THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

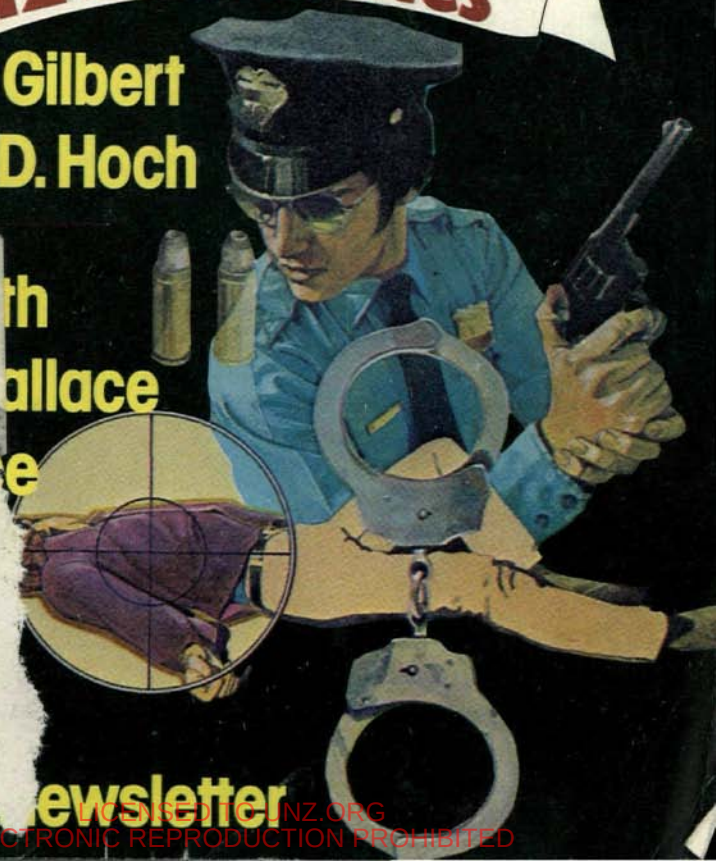
ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

160 PAGES

JULY 1976 $1.00
#392 UK 35p, AUS-NZ 95¢ 02057

ALL-NEW ISSUE
12 new stories

Michael Gilbert
Edward D. Hoch
Pa[illegible]
Hig[illegible]th
Ed[illegible]allace
La[illegible]e
Tr[illegible]t
Da[illegible]d
El[illegible]
ar[illegible]E
M[illegible]ewsletter



LICENSED TO LINZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQA #31 is here!

Spring/Summer '76 Edition

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY ANTHOLOGY
—31ST ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Over 300 pages of superb mystery entertainment from the ***WHO's WHO*** *of* ***WHODUNITS.***

Let these masters of mystery give you hours of delightful reading—you'll find them all in this brand new EQ Mystery Anthology!

3 Short Novels by

Rex Stout **Holly Roth** **Ed McBain**

11 Short Stories by

John D. MacDonald
Isaac Asimov
Gerald Kersh
William Bankier
Simon Troy
Florence V. Mayberry
Berkely Mather
Alan K. Young
Robert L. Fish
E. X. Ferrars

Ellery Queen

Extra coupon on page 68.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Anthology, 229 Park Ave. S., NY, NY 10003
_____*Enclosed is $1.95 plus 25 cents for postage and handling for the Spring/Summer 1976 Edition of EQA #31.*

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

FIVE RINGS IN RENO	R. L. Stevens	6
STARLING'S CIRCLE	David Ely	22
FAIR EXCHANGE	Edward Wellen	33
P AS IN POISON	Lawrence Treat	40
THE MATCHWIT CLUB	Francis M. Nevins, Jr.	53
A MORE-OR-LESS CRIME	Edgar Wallace	69
SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO LIVE WITH	Patricia Highsmith	78
THE WEASEL	Jack P. Nelson	93
THE LAST CIGAR	Duffy Carpenter	101
THE BOX	Isak Romun	121
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?	William Bankier	123
LICENSE PLATE UGC 368M	Michael Gilbert	129
THE THEFT OF THE WOODEN EGG	Edward D. Hoch	142
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER	Otto Penzler & Chris Steinbrunner	113

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: *Joel Davis* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 68, No. 1, Whole No. 392, JULY, 1976. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.00 a copy. Annual subscription $14.00 in U.S.A.; $15.00 in U.S. possessions and Canada; $16.00 in the Pan American Union and in all other countries. Editorial and Executive Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct. 06830. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and additional mailing offices. *© 1976 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.* *Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

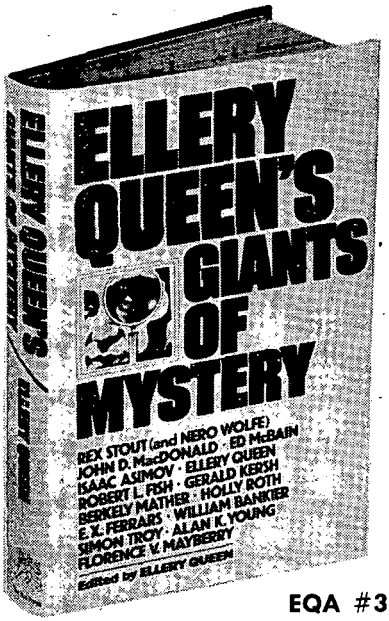
B. G. DAVIS, *President, Chairman of the Board (1957—1972)*

VICTOR C. STABILE, *Vice Pres. & Treas.* – LEONARD F. PINTO, *Vice Pres. & General Manager*
ELEANOR SULLIVAN, *Managing Editor* – CONSTANCE DIRIENZO, *Exec. Sec., Rts & Perm. Mgr.*
JIM CAPPELLO, *Adv. Mgr.* – HUI WANG, *Production Dir.* – IRVING BERNSTEIN, *Art. Dir.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IT'S HERE—THE NEW LIBRARY EDITION!

Order now the third in the series of hardbound editions of Ellery Queen's Mystery Anthology


ELLERY QUEEN'S GIANTS OF MYSTERY
REX STOUT (and NERO WOLFE) · JOHN D. MacDONALD · ED McBAIN
ISAAC ASIMOV · ELLERY QUEEN
ROBERT L. FISH · GERALD KERSH
BERKELY MATHER · HOLLY ROTH
E. X. FERRARS · WILLIAM BANKIER
SIMON TROY · ALAN K. YOUNG
FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY
Edited by ELLERY QUEEN

you'll enjoy 3 great short novels and 11 great short stories

another handsome home library anthology edited by Ellery Queen delivered to your doorstep

EQA #31

FOR THE TOPS IN MYSTERY ENTERTAINMENT

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY ANTHOLOGY—LIBRARY EDITION
229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003

Enclosed is $8.95 plus 65 cents ($9.60) for postage and handling for my copy of "Giants of Mystery".

Name _____
(please print)

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

NYC residents add 8% sales tax.

EQMM776

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

YES! Please send me the New ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGY with its treasure chest of 30 chilling exercises in the art of murder and suspense. I understand that if I order either a 2-year or a 3-year subscription to ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, the Library Edition is included in the offers shown below and saves me as much as $13.50!

TO: ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
P.O. BOX 2600
Greenwich, Conn. 06830 **SPECIAL CASH OFFERS!**

☐ This is a new order ☐ Please extend my subscription

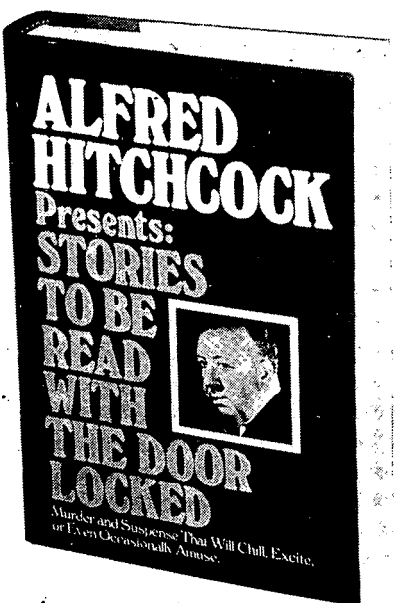
☐ Enclosed is $17.95 for 2 FULL YEARS of ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE—PLUS the 365-page library Edition. A $26.95 total value, I save $9.00!

☐ Enclosed is $22.45 for 3 FULL YEARS (36 issues) of AHMM—PLUS the new Library Edition. A $35.95 value, I save $13.50!

☐ I enclose $9.00 for 1-FULL YEAR of AHMM. I do not want the Library Edition.

H6A294

ORDER NOW! DON'T MISS THIS BRAND NEW HITCHCOCK OFFER!
The Random House Library Edition of The New ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS "Stories To Be Read With The Door Locked." It's yours at a great bargain when you order a 2 or 3 year subscription of ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE.


ALFRED HITCHCOCK
Presents:
STORIES TO BE READ WITH THE DOOR LOCKED
Murder and Suspense That Will Chill, Excite, or Even Occasionally Amuse.

SAVE UP TO $13.50! **AN $8.95 Value!**

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first copy of AHMM.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* detective story by

R. L. STEVENS

There is a new trend in current literature—fiction involving real-life persons. Sometimes the events narrated actually occurred; sometimes the events might *have occurred. In R. L. Stevens' newest story we go back in history to Reno, Nevada, on July 4, 1910. There you will meet Jack Johnson, Jim Jeffries, Jack London, and—how easily it* might *have happened!—Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, playing a strange double role—prizefight referee and champion detective!*

FIVE RINGS IN RENO

by R. L. STEVENS

In his excellent biography, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,* John Dickson Carr tells us that Doyle was invited to act as referee for the heavyweight championship fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries in Reno, Nevada, on July 4, 1910. Doyle tentatively accepted, with great pleasure, but changed his mind a week later and sent his regrets.

Now what if Doyle had gone to Reno . . .?

Arthur Conan Doyle stepped off the train at the Reno depot looking a bit bewildered. After traveling across an ocean and a continent to reach the small city near the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains, he had at least expected someone would be there to meet him and take his bags.

"Sir Arthur!" a voice called suddenly, and he turned to see a slim blond young man striding toward him. "Didn't expect the train to be on time. They never are!"

"These are my bags," Doyle said, indicating two well-traveled Gladstones. "You would be Mr. Summons?"

© *1976 by R. L. Stevens.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Charlie Summons, at your service, Sir Arthur."

"The title I value most is that of 'Doctor,' if you don't mind."

"Oh—certainly, Dr. Doyle! This way, please."

"Somehow I expected Reno would be larger."

Charlie Summons turned with a trace of apology. "Well, it's not London, Sir—Dr. Doyle—but we like to think of ourselves as the biggest little city in the west. And this fight is really goin' to put us on the map!"

"It's certainly a lengthy journey by train," Doyle remarked. "I've written occasionally about the American west, but this is my first personal view of it. When I visited the States in '94 I never came further west than Chicago and Milwaukee."

"I read what you wrote about the Mormons of Utah in *A Study in Scarlet*. Could have sworn you'd actually been there!"

Doyle smiled at the compliment. "I read a great deal about your country before coming here."

They had reached the street outside the depot, and Summons was loading the bags into the back seat of an elegant black motorcar with polished brass trim. "This is a 1908 Packard," Summons explained. "You don't see many cars out west yet, but we have a few of 'em available for special visitors like yourself."

"It is quite a handsome vehicle," Doyle conceded, climbing up into the passenger's seat. "I suppose the motorcar is the coming thing in London too, though I do hate to see them replacing the hansom cabs."

Charlie Summons cranked the engine and then jumped in as the car coughed into life. "Times are changing, Dr. Doyle. Last month a biplane took off from a street in Washington right next to the White House."

"I'll remain on the ground, thank you," Doyle said with a smile.

"We've got you a fine room at the Reno Hotel. Everyone important is staying there. There's another writer too—Jack London. He's covering the fight for the San Francisco *Chronicle* and the New York *Herald*."

Doyle's face lit up. "I'll be interested in meeting Jack London. Some people have detected minor evidences of us in each other's stories. When I toured America last time I met Rudyard Kipling in Vermont and we became good friends."

Summons pulled the car up in front of the hotel. "Oh, oh! There's Monica Malone—that means trouble!"

Doyle found himself mildly amused by the man. "And what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trouble might such a comely young woman offer?"

"She read how you helped solve that mystery in England a few years back, and she imagines you're Sherlock Holmes himself. She'll be wanting your help."

"Holmes! Is that name going to haunt me here too?"

But he climbed down from the car and went to meet the young lady. "Dr. Conan Doyle?" she asked. "I must speak with you on a most urgent matter."

"Nothing is so urgent right now as the fight that will take place in two days. I am not here in my capacity as an author—or as a doctor—but as a referee." Though he was 51 years old and only recently married to his charming second wife, Doyle still had an eye for a beautiful woman. Miss Malone's cameo face reminded him of a girl he had known long ago, during his university days.

"I realize I'm intruding on your time," she said apologetically, "but if you could only listen to my story—"

"My dear young lady, I have only just arrived in your city. I have important meetings with the principals in this prizefight, and you understand I must attend to that business first. But should you chance to be in the neighborhood early this evening, I will try to find time to speak with you."

"That's most kind," she said.

Then, before Doyle could say more, he was whisked away by Charlie Summons. "We're running a bit late, Dr. Doyle. They're waiting for us."

Summons settled him into a front room with windows overlooking South Virginia Street. The hotel was crowded with guests, and even in the halls Doyle was aware of money changing hands. Obviously the fight was attracting a great deal of betting interest.

After a half hour in which Doyle unpacked and washed up, Summons escorted him to a first-floor meeting room where a number of men were awaiting him. Doyle's first impression was that the sporting classes were much the same in America as in England. Colonel Raff Grayson, who seemed to be one of the fight's promoters, could easily have acted a role in Doyle's prizefighting drama, *The House of Temperley,* which was playing at London's Adelphi Theatre.

"So good of you to make the journey, Dr. Doyle," he said, rising to shake hands. "The problems of selecting a referee acceptable to both sides in this fight has been immense. The color question—black versus white—has raised needless tensions on all sides.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frankly, you were the only person acceptable to both managers."

Doyle bowed slightly. "I consider that a sincere compliment, especially since I know so little of American boxing."

"The rules are much the same as in your British sport," Colonel Grayson assured him. "The Marquis of Queensberry is well known here. But our main problem was finding a referee whom both sides trusted. As you know, Jeffries has come out of retirement to win back his heavyweight title from this black man, Jack Johnson. Feelings are running high, and there is even talk of race riots in some American cities."

"All seems peaceful here," Doyle observed.

"Don't be deceived. A man was knifed to death near the depot two nights ago—a reporter out here to cover the fight. His killer has not yet been found."

"I know enough about the American west," Doyle said, "to realize that the price of human life is not high out here. A wrong word spoken during a poker game, I understand, can lead to a stabbing or shooting."

Grayson exchanged glances with the other men, whom he had not yet introduced. "Come, Dr. Doyle, we feel ourselves far more civilized than that! The west of 1910 is far removed from the west of 1890."

"Perhaps," Doyle admitted. "Even passing through New York I read of a recent diamond robbery and killing. Crime is certainly not confined to the western states."

"In any event, precautions have been taken for Monday's fight. As one of the promoters I can assure you the crowd will be under complete control."

A large man of indeterminate middle age spoke up. "I was a fighter myself, Dr. Doyle. I know what it's like to stand in the center of a ring and hear the crowd shouting for blood after an unpopular decision."

The Colonel made the belated introductions. "This is Nevada Wade, Dr. Conan Doyle."

Doyle smiled. "Sounds like a cowboy's name."

"Cowboys and boxers aren't much different," Wade agreed. "I was a heavyweight contender in my fighting days, but I never had a crack at the championship."

He looked like a man who could still hold his own in the prize ring, and Doyle wondered why he had retired. From the looks of the large diamond ring on his little finger he might well have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come into money. "When will I see the site of Monday's battle?" Doyle asked, shifting his attention back to the Colonel.

"We'll go out to the fairgrounds tomorrow morning. The ring and the seating are already in place, but the workmen are still adding the finishing touches." He looked up at the ornate wall clock. "Only forty-eight hours to fight time, Dr. Doyle. Less than that, really."

He made an effort to introduce the others in the room—backers and managers and promoters—but Doyle found himself quickly engaged in more conversation with Nevada Wade. "I understand there's a new Sherlock Holmes play in the Strand this summer."

Doyle nodded. "*The Speckled Band* opened last month, and it's been quite successful."

"One of my favorite stories—the one with the snake."

Americans never failed to amaze him. This man with a cowboy's name and callused fists had actually read his stories! "That is the one. We tried using a real snake on stage—nonpoisonous, of course—but it didn't work out. Now we have an ingeniously jointed dummy manipulated with black thread like a puppet. It is most effective."

"I should like to see the play sometime," Wade said.

"Perhaps we will have an American production."

Charlie Summons appeared at Doyle's side and whispered, "If you want to scram out of here, I'll help you."

"Scram—?"

"On the weekend of a big fight this crowd'll be drinking all night. I already told the Colonel you needed to rest after your long trip out here."

"Thank you," Doyle said, and he was genuinely grateful.

He ate with Summons in the hotel restaurant, listening to the slim young man's tales of Reno's sporting life. At one point he asked, "Just what is your connection with Colonel Grayson?"

"Oh, the Colonel pays me. I run errands for him—things like that."

Doyle had earlier noticed the bulge under the other man's coat, and now he commented upon it. "Are you his bodyguard too?"

"What? Oh, you mean the gun? This is still the west, Dr. Doyle. You'll find a good many men carrying weapons."

"Interesting."

"I guess they don't carry guns in London."

"No, not in London. Not even our police-officers."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charlie Summons took a sip of the wine Doyle had ordered with the meal. "Say, this isn't bad."

"My tastes run more to French than to California wines, I'm afraid. But as you say, it isn't bad." He was beginning to like the young man for some reason, perhaps because he was so typically American.

"You going to see Monica Malone?" Summons asked suddenly.

"Who?"

"The girl outside the hotel when you arrived."

"I'd completely forgotten about her."

"She'll prob'ly come around tonight to see you."

As Doyle was to discover within the hour, the young man's prediction proved accurate. He had barely left Summons and started up to his room when Monica Malone intercepted him. She clutched a folded newspaper in one hand, and as she spoke there were tears in her eyes. "I must see you, Dr. Doyle. You said you would talk with me."

"And I will. But I can hardly invite you up to my room. Let us sit in that corner of the lobby where we won't be disturbed."

She followed him to a red plush sofa partly hidden by a tall fern in an ornate jardinière. "Thank you so much, Dr. Doyle. These last days have been a nightmare for me."

He sat down beside her. "I assume you are referring to the brutal murder of your fiancé near the railway station two nights ago."

"Someone has told you who I am!"

"No, not really, Miss Malone. But I noticed your agitated state, and the fact that you are carrying a copy of yesterday's newspaper folded so that an account of the killing is visible. You also wear an engagement ring, which you twist nervously with your fingers, as if you were considering removing it. The conclusion seems a likely one."

"You sound like Sherlock Holmes himself!"

"Please!" He held up a hand to silence her. "I pretend no special powers to solve this mystery. But tell me what happened."

"Tom—my fiancé, Tom Andrews—came out here last month to cover preparations for the fight. He was a reporter for *Ring & Turf,* an eastern sporting weekly. I arrived yesterday to join him and discovered he'd been murdered."

"I understand the fight has touched off some scattered violence because of the racial aspects."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No one would have killed Tom for that reason—he was completely fair to both men! They'd more likely have stabbed Jack London—he's been wondering aloud about the Negro having a yellow streak."

"What about one of the other reporters? Had your fiancé been on bad terms with any of them?"

She shook her head, fighting back the tears, and he wanted to comfort her somehow. To give her a few moments to compose herself, he took the folded newspaper from her hand and read the brief account of the murder. There had been no witnesses, and the young reporter's wallet was found intact. So robbery could not have been the motive. The fatal stabbing near the railroad station must have had another cause.

"Could he have gone there to meet someone arriving by train?" Doyle asked.

"But who? I wasn't due until yesterday and he knew that."

"Still, a great many persons are arriving daily for the fight. He might have gone to meet one of them."

"I think he knew he might be killed, Dr. Doyle."

"Why do you say that?"

"He left a message for me at his hotel. Just a brief note—I have it here." She opened her purse and produced an envelope with a folded piece of paper inside.

Doyle read it aloud. "*'Dearest Monica: If anything should happen to me before you arrive, remember the fifth day of Christmas. All my love, Tom.'*" He studied the note with a deepening frown. "The fifth day of Christmas? What could that mean?"

"That's why I want your help, Dr. Doyle—I don't know! I tried to talk with the police about it, but they paid no attention. They're too busy keeping things calm before Monday's fight."

He continued to study the note, the only message from a man he'd never known, a man now dead. "Did you know Tom last Christmas?"

"Certainly. He gave me this ring then."

Doyle was instantly alert. "Just one ring?"

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"In the old carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas,* there is a line that goes, *'The fifth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me five gold rings.'*"

"Of course! We always sang that at Christmas-time! Tom was sending me a message about five gold rings. But what rings?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't know," Doyle admitted.

"Engagement rings?"

"One other possibility presents itself. This weekend in Reno the word *ring* has another meaning."

"A prizefighting ring!"

"Perhaps." He folded the note and returned it to its envelope. "He left this at the hotel for you?"

"Yes, at the desk."

"Let me keep it for a time. Something might occur to me."

"Thank you, Dr. Doyle. If you can find the person who killed Tom—"

"We won't go quite that far yet." He rose. "Please excuse me now. I have had a tiring train trip, and I am anxious to get some sleep."

"I'll look for you tomorrow."

He smiled at her. "Tomorrow I must go to the fairgrounds to inspect the scene of the action and meet the participants. But I will try to help you in any way that I can."

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes—I mean, Dr. Doyle."

He watched as she crossed the lobby to the street, and then went up to his room. Once more that confounded Sherlock Holmes had intruded on his life.

On Sunday morning he walked down to the Reno railway station using the newspaper account of the tragedy to seek out the scene of the crime. He thought that he had found it, and was bending to examine a stain on the sidewalk, when a familiar voice hailed him.

"Dr. Conan Doyle! What brings you out this early?"

It was Colonel Raff Grayson, just alighting from his motorcar. He seemed to be alone. "Good morning, Colonel. I'm just exploring a bit of your city."

"Nothing to see down at the depot. But if you'll wait while I pick up some freight I'll drive you out to the fairgrounds."

His freight proved to be a wooden cage of pheasants, which Doyle helped him carry to the back seat of the motorcar. "Will you be having a pheasant shoot after the fight?" he asked the Colonel.

"No, just a pheasant roast. These birds are only two to three pounds each, but at two servings a bird I have enough here for ten of us. I figure my wife and me, Nevada Wade and his lady,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both fighters and their women, yourself, and Mr. Jack London. I hope you'll be able to join us."

"I'd be pleased," Doyle said, "though I don't know whether Mr. Johnson and Mr. Jeffries will feel up to roast pheasant after fighting fifteen rounds."

Colonel Grayson smiled. "Oh, I think Jeffries will finish the black boy much quicker than that. Just off the record, of course."

Doyle was silent, avoiding any hint of favoritism on the day before he was to referee the event. He waited until they were on the road, heading for the fairgrounds, before he spoke. "Did you know the reporter who was murdered the other night?"

Colonel Grayson turned to smile at him. "The old detective instinct getting you, Dr. Doyle? I didn't know him, but Charlie Summons had played cards with him a few times these past weeks. Charlie says he was a nice fellow."

"Who do you think stabbed him?"

"The fight is attracting a certain criminal element to Reno, Dr. Doyle. It's unfortunate but true."

The Reno fairgrounds was at the northeast edge of the city. Today, under a warm July sun, it was a beehive of activity. Motorcars and wagons were parked everywhere in a haphazard fashion, while workers climbed over the grandstand putting the finishing touches on the seats and refreshment stands.

As they approached after parking the automobile, Charlie Summons hurried forward to meet them. "You'd better come quick, Colonel! Johnson and Jeffries are both here, and I'm afraid they'll start fighting a day early!"

They found the two heavyweights at the center of a growing circle of partisan supporters. Jack Johnson, his gleaming black head catching the noonday sun, was taunting the grizzly Jim Jeffries. Johnson never lost his smile, not even when one of the crowd called out, "What about the yellow streak, Johnson?"

"I will show you tomorrow who has the yellow streak." And still smiling he turned his back on Jeffries.

Colonel Grayson quickly interrupted to introduce the fighters to Conan Doyle. Jim Jeffries shook his hand vigorously. "I been reading those Sherlock Holmes stories—he's a great one, he is!"

And Johnson was no less enthusiastic. Doyle was amazed they would welcome an Englishman so warmly to referee their fight. He was really beginning to enjoy himself for the first time since his arrival when Nevada Wade approached with a short, light-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

haired man in his mid-thirties. At the sight of them Jack Johnson stalked away.

"Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle, this here's a great admirer of yours—Mr. Jack London."

London shook Doyle's hand with as much vigor as Jeffries had. "A pleasure to meet you, Dr. Doyle—or Sir Arthur."

"Dr. Doyle suits me fine. I read your book *The People of the Abyss* with a great deal of interest, Mr. London."

"I wrote it while living in London for some months in 1901. My funds had run out and I actually lived with those poor East End people." London smiled. "Later I rented a room in the home of a London detective. It wasn't 221B Baker Street, though."

"I should hope not," Doyle replied with a chuckle. Summons and the Colonel went off to unload the pheasants, while Nevada Wade continued to stroll with the two authors. Doyle was anxious to see the ring itself, and to get the feel of the place. When they reached it he went up the steps and climbed between the ropes, closely followed by London.

"There is nothing quite so invigorating as the prize ring," the American said. "I've been here ten days writing up the training camps and the fight preliminaries."

Doyle bent to examine London's eye. "As a physician skilled in such matters, I could not help noticing the fading after-effects of a black eye. Have you been engaging in some fisticuffs yourself, Mr. London?"

"That happened two weeks ago, in an Oakland bar. It was in all the papers, I'm afraid. A drunken brawl, they called it."

"Was it?"

London sighed, gazing out at the empty rows of seats, and changed the subject. "My wife gave birth to a daughter on June 19th. The baby only lived three days."

"I am sorry," Doyle said.

Nevada Wade joined them in the ring, "Which of you chaps has published the most?" he asked, flashing his diamond ring.

Doyle laughed. "Oh, Mr. London is far ahead of me. How many books is it now?"

"Twenty-four," London answered almost mechanically. "Though I hardly have your fame."

"Tell me something," Doyle pursued. "In *The People of the Abyss* you showed a real compassion for the poor and downtrodden of London's East End. Yet your writings thus far about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fight have shown a decided racist slant. How do you explain this seeming contradiction?"

Jack London shrugged. "I am what I am, Dr. Doyle. And we will see tomorrow who the better fighter is."

"Jeffries can't come back," Nevada Wade said. "Once they've retired they never come back."

"We'll see." London gave a slight bow in Doyle's direction. "Until tomorrow."

Doyle watched the younger writer climb out of the ring, then turned to Wade. "An odd sort of chap—a real contradiction."

"He's had some hard times, Dr. Doyle."

"He mentioned his daughter's death."

"That's only part of it."

Doyle was reminded of the other death in recent days, and of the message Tom Andrews had left for Monica. "Tell me, Mr. Wade, is this the only prize ring brought in for the fight?"

"Brought in?" Wade didn't grasp the question.

"I mean, are there any other boxing rings in Reno?"

"Well, sure." He removed his western hat and scratched at his balding head. "The Athletic Club has one, and the Boxing Club. And right now each of the two training camps has a ring."

"Counting this one, that would make five in all."

"Well, I guess so," Nevada Wade conceded. "What about it?"

Doyle shrugged. "Now, tell me about yourself. You say you boxed professionally?"

"That was a good many years ago, but the sport was my life then."

"Why did you give it up?"

"In the west a man has to live the best way he can. Some gamblers wanted me to take a dive and when I won instead, they broke my hands. I decided it was better to be a gambler than a fighter."

"Are you betting on tomorrow's fight?"

"Sure thing."

"Which way?"

"Like I said, Jeffries can't come back. If there's to be a Great White Hope, it isn't Jim Jeffries."

"Which side is the Colonel on?"

"The other side," Wade answered with a dry chuckle. "He's always on the other side."

Doyle stood for a moment in the center of the ring, turning first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one way, then the other, imagining himself as he would be the following day. He touched his mustache, smoothing the ends with their long waxed points. "They say Johnson is something of a clown in the ring, constantly taunting his opponent."

"He play-acts a lot, it's true," Wade agreed. "But it'll be a Jeffries crowd here tomorrow."

"It should be an interesting fight."

Doyle dined again that evening with Charlie Summons, finding himself increasingly taken with the little man. But before they'd had time to relax over coffee and cigars, Monica Malone rushed up to the table. "Dr. Doyle, I must see you! Will you be long? I've been looking everywhere for you."

Doyle excused himself and followed her out to the hotel lobby. "What agitates you so, my dear girl?"

"I didn't want to speak in front of that man."

"Summons? He was a friend of your fiancé."

"I doubt that," she said. "But what I have to tell you is that I recognized someone Tom did know—a man named Draco. He's connected with the rackets back east. Tom wrote an exposé about him—how he doped a race horse."

"Giving him a motive for wanting to kill your fiancé. Where can I find this man?"

"I just saw him entering a bar down the block."

"Did he recognize you?"

"I don't think so. He wouldn't remember me."

Doyle made his regrets to Charlie Summons and set off down the block to the bar Monica had indicated. She pointed out a tall, dark-haired man lounging against a corner of the bar, and Doyle approached him.

"Mr. Draco, I presume?"

The face that turned to him was scarred and ugly. It was plain to see how Monica had recognized him so easily. Doyle remembered Jack London's black eye from the barroom brawl, and prayed the writer would never end up like this. "What do you want?" Draco asked.

"Just to talk. My name is Arthur Conan Doyle."

The name obviously meant nothing to the man. "You a Limey?"

"I'm from England, yes. I am over here to referee the fight tomorrow."

"Yeah?" This interested him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I believe you know a man named Tom Andrews."

Draco muttered an obscenity.

"He was murdered here in Reno three nights ago. Did you know that?"

"If I'd been in town I'd of done the job myself."

"But you weren't in town?"

"Just got in today. Come for the fight."

Doyle was inclined to believe the man. Besides, his statement could be easily checked. "I have been told you drug race horses. Wouldn't think of trying your skill on a prizefighter, would you?"

"Not a chance! Listen, I'll tell you about your friend Tom Andrews, in case you still think he's some sorta saint." The man stepped a bit closer, and Doyle could smell gin on his breath. "Sure, I doped a horse or two in my day. Andrews found out about it and wrote his story. But he didn't turn it in to his editor right away. Oh, no. He came to me first and showed it to me. Said he'd tear it up if I'd give him five thousand dollars."

"Interesting. What did you do?"

"Told him I wouldn't be blackmailed and kicked his butt outa my office." He smiled at the memory. "I didn't have no five grand anyhow."

"So he printed the article?"

"Damned right! Ruined my racing career."

"What are you doing now?"

"Picking up a buck any way I can."

"Do five rings mean anything to you? Five rings in Reno?"

Draco looked blank. "Not a thing."

Doyle put down money for another gin and left the man there. In the street, fighting to keep her place on the crowded sidewalk, Monica was waiting. "What did you find out?" she demanded.

"Nothing. Draco only just arrived in Reno."

"So he says!"

"Let me escort you back to your hotel, Miss Malone. The city is growing more crowded by the hour, and the streets may not be safe for a young woman."

"I can take care of myself."

"I am sure you can. But the person who killed Tom might find it very easy to knife you in a crowd. Your inquiries could be worrying him."

She paled at his words. "Perhaps you're right."

"Come along."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I was foolish to think of you as Sherlock Holmes. There's nothing you can do for me or Tom."

"I never pretended to be Holmes," he insisted. But was it true?

Five gold rings . . .

He started humming it to himself as they walked. *Seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings, four colly birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.*

Ahead of them a boy set off a string of firecrackers in the gutter. It was the eve of America's Independence Day, an odd time to be humming Christmas carols to oneself.

Five gold rings . . .

"You're right," he told her at the door of the hotel. "I'm not Holmes."

She turned to gaze into his eyes. "I only wish that you were."

The morning dawned warm and sunny. There would be a shirtsleeve crowd at the fight in a few hours. Doyle hoped the decision would be clean-cut. Any uncertainty as to the outcome could only carry over into the streets of Reno.

Charlie Summons called for him promptly at nine, escorting him out to the motorcar. "Beautiful day for it, Dr. Doyle."

"That it is, Charlie."

"The Colonel has a tent up on the fairgrounds, for his celebration dinner afterwards."

"Too bad you're not included on the guest list."

Charlie snickered. "Colonel Grayson said he might include me, if one of the fighters doesn't feel up to eating."

Though the fight was still some hours off, people were already streaming into the grandstand. Many carried picnic lunches and bottles of beverage. And the crackle of fireworks had become almost constant. "Is this how they celebrate your Fourth of July?" Doyle asked.

"You'll get used to the noise," Summons assured him.

In the striped tent set off beyond the parking lot they found Colonel Raff Grayson making last-minute preparations. "I will have chefs to prepare dinner after the main event," he told Doyle. "By that time I'm sure you'll have worked up an appetite."

Doyle nodded.

Nevada Wade came in with a young woman clinging to his arm. "The press is searching for you, Dr. Doyle. They want an interview with Sherlock Holmes!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm not—" Doyle began, then fell silent. What difference did it make? He could be Sherlock Holmes if they wanted him to be.

Outside, heading toward the press tent, he came upon Monica Malone. "Here for the fight?" he asked.

"I'm here to settle with Tom's killer."

"What?"

"One of the reporters told me Tom was on Draco's trail. He was sure Draco was heading for Reno to close some sort of crooked deal. I have a gun in this handbag, Dr. Doyle, and when I see Draco—"

"My dear, don't even talk such foolishness!" He grasped at the purse, feeling the metallic weight of it. "I'd better take that."

He slipped the small weapon out of the purse and dropped it in his pocket.

"That won't stop me," she insisted. "If you can't do anything, I will!"

The crowd was thickening around them. Spectators mingled with souvenir vendors, and at that moment Doyle's eyes were caught by a gold American eagle on the cover of an Independence Day program. "Birds," he muttered to himself.

"What did you say?" Monica asked.

"Of course! They were all birds! I remember now!"

"What are you talking about?"

The excitement welled within him. "Hurry, woman! Find some police-officers and bring them to Colonel Grayson's tent!"

Then he was on his way. The first person he saw as he burst into the tent was Draco. The ugly man turned from his task, surprised at the sudden intrusion. "You again!"

And then Colonel Grayson came forward. "Can I be of service, Dr. Doyle?"

"On the contrary, Colonel. I came to assist you in dressing those birds for dinner."

Grayson shot a glance at the table behind him. "You needn't concern yourself—"

Doyle felt the hardness of Monica Malone's gun in his pocket, and he drew it out. "Just stand there, both of you. Police-officers will be here soon enough."

"Police? For what?"

"To arrest you for murder, Colonel. You killed Tom Andrews when he tried to blackmail you."

"That's insane!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is it? Andrews was killed near the railway station, because that is where he found you awaiting your delivery. Just as I found you yesterday morning. He left a message for Monica Malone, telling her to remember the fifth day of Christmas. In the old carol the fifth day's gift was five gold rings. Not wedding rings, or prize rings. I finally remembered something I read long ago. In the carol the gifts of the first seven days are all birds. The five gold rings referred to five ring-necked pheasants—like those on the table behind you. I didn't count the birds at the station yesterday, but I remembered you had enough to feed ten guests, at two servings per bird. Therefore, five birds—five ring-necked pheasants."

Grayson started to move then, but Monica lifted the tent flap and entered with the police. "What's all this?" one detective asked. "Aren't you Arthur Conan Doyle?"

Doyle handed over his weapon and picked up a carving knife instead. "If you'll cover the Colonel, we'll see what's in these five birds."

He slit them open, one after another, and carefully extracted a number of small hard objects. "Wash them off and you will find they are diamonds—no doubt from that New York robbery a few weeks back. Colonel Grayson was acting as a fence for the loot, and probably planning to resell it to Draco here. Somehow Andrews found out about Draco's involvement and tried to blackmail the Colonel. That's when he was killed. I should have known those birds were valuable. Grayson sent Charlie Summons to meet me at the station, but he went himself—and alone—to pick up a heavy cage of pheasants."

"But how did you know there were jewels in the birds?" Monica asked.

Arthur Conan Doyle smiled. "The diamonds? Well, you see Sherlock Holmes once solved a case in which a carbuncle was hidden inside a Christmas goose. But come, it is almost fight time and I must be in the ring."

Jack Johnson stopped Jim Jeffries in the fifteenth round, thus retaining the heavyweight championship of the world. And Jack London wrote, "Jeff today disposed of one question. He could not come back. Johnson, in turn, answered another question. He has not the yellow streak."

His article made no mention of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

DAVID ELY

The young artists, writers, and artisans who met at Phoebe's were poor and unknown. These years of obscurity might turn out to be the happiest of their lives. So it was intolerable that a single day of this hopeful, carefree period should be ruined by Starling . . .

STARLING'S CIRCLE

by DAVID ELY

The idea of murdering Starling started as a joke among the young artists and writers who used to drop in at Phoebe's coffee shop in Hampstead at the end of the day. No one could remember who had proposed it, or what particular incident, if any, had touched it off. The idea seemed to have leaped into being spontaneously, owing its origin to no single person—or if anyone were responsible, then it had to be Starling himself, who was so impervious to snubs, rebuffs, and even insults, that murder seemed the only way to get rid of him.

In any event, the idea appeared, took hold, and flourished. The group at Phoebe's began reviewing the various possible methods—whether Starling should be shot or stoned or suffocated, or if poisoning would be preferable to drowning. Someone suggested a traditional beheading on Tower Green, and someone else proposed throwing him to wolves (if wolves could be hired for the occasion from the Zoo), or beating him to death with tightly rolled copies of *The Times*.

The joke became elaborated by ritual. Sprat, the lean and lanky poet, acted as Lord Chancellor. Using the sugar bowl as a gavel, he would call the group to order, and in a pompous judicial voice would inquire, "What will the sentence be today, lords and ladies of the court?" Then, starting with the person on Sprat's left, the means of putting Starling to death would be developed progressively around the table, each participant being required to add, in

© *1976 by David Ely.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather loose alliteration, some refinement to the method proposed.

If the first speaker responded to the Chancellor's question by saying "hacked by hatchets," the next one might expand this to "hacked in half by hatchets," until, when everyone had had his say, the full sentence could be "hacked in half by hatchets hurled in hysterical hatred," or "boiled in bubbling baths of blazing briquettes," or something along those lines.

Starling himself was often present at these ceremonies, but since the name of the victim was not mentioned, he didn't realize that he was the object of these dread judgments, which he thought boring and silly, particularly since he wasn't allowed to take part.

Who was this Starling, and why did he arouse such macabre humor in those who, against their will, were acquainted with him? He was a painter in his mid-thirties who, through incessant scrounging, had managed to survive for years in various European cities, and was now (in his opinion only) on the very threshold of success. As a painter he was so bad he was unforgettable. As a self-promoter he was something of a genius.

He had a monomaniac concentration on himself and his work. Nothing could deflect him from that subject. Negative reactions didn't daunt him. He was even encouraged by them, for he made a virtue of the fact that he painted badly.

"You don't like it?" he would say to someone he saw recoiling from one of his frightful canvases. "Of course you don't like it! You're not *supposed* to like it. When life is offensive, art has to be offensive too—and that's what I paint, life in all its ugliness, all its offensiveness . . . It revolts you, does it? Ah, that's precisely the effect I was aiming for!"

So hideous was his art, and so self-confident was the artist, that doubts were stirred in the minds of persons of taste and judgment. Was it conceivable, they wondered, that Starling possessed an authentic gift, a sort of anti-talent? "In three years," he would say over and over, "I'll be one of the top artists in England," and this repetition, backed by the stunning tastelessness of his work, had its effect on those who knew the unpredictable world of art. Granted that Starling was awful—who could tell? Maybe his particular awfulness would suddenly become a vogue.

Every week he would take his paintings around to the galleries, unperturbed by refusals. "Bilcock is weakening," he'd report confidently at Phoebe's. "Bilcock will be the first." Once Sprat happened to be passing Bilcock's, and on impulse went inside and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mentioned Starling's name. Bilcock remembered him, all right. Who could forget Starling?

"The man's impossible," Bilcock said in a furious voice. "I keep telling him his work is rubbish—and he agrees, as calmly as you please. He says that's his aim—to create rubbish! He says it will sell. He says we'll get rich together with his filthy rubbish!" And there was, in Bilcock's eyes, the familiar look of anybody who had been exposed to Starling, a look of tormented surmise. Was it barely possible that Starling was right?

Starling somewhat resembled one of his paintings, being a slapdash little man with muddy features and a poor color scheme. Yet he considered himself overpoweringly attractive, and told improbable tales about the Roman countesses who had been enslaved by him, and the movie starlets in Paris who had fought for his attentions. He outraged the women in the group at Phoebe's by implying that they, too, were susceptible to his charms. Whenever one of them reacted angrily to this absurdity, Starling would simply smile.

"There's something between us," he would say calmly. "I can feel it." If the young lady in question continued to berate him, he would take it as proof of her suppressed passion for him. "Why struggle against it?" he would say, and finally she would break off, so maddened by his bland assumption of irresistibility that she couldn't help wondering if, in some perverse way, she wasn't just a little bit drawn to him, after all.

Starling's egotism left no room for anyone else. He didn't praise or damn the works of other artists; he paid no attention to them. He presumably had a first name, but he didn't use it. Starling was Starling, just as Rembrandt was Rembrandt. He often referred to himself in the third person, as if he were already a historical figure. When Bradley, the goldsmith, told him once that he would probably find a more congenial atmosphere at some other coffee shop, Starling merely shrugged.

"Starling will make this place famous someday," Starling mused, gazing about Phoebe's walls as though envisioning the bronze plaque that would be placed there. He was doing Phoebe a favor by coming there; he was doing them all a favor. They'd be known as Starling's Circle! Molly Pinkerton, the sculptor, began ironically referring to the group that way until the others made her stop.

The young people who met at Phoebe's had not yet achieved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recognition in their fields, but they realized that these years, when they were poor and unknown, might turn out to be the happiest of their lives—and it was intolerable that a single day of this hopeful, carefree period should be ruined by Starling.

"There's a touch of Starling in each of us," Sprat said once. "That's why we react so strongly to him." There were exclamations of outrage at this slander, but Sprat went on, undeterred. "Starling is a horrible painter, it's true," he said, "but he does represent, in a particularly hideous form, the self-centered nature of an artist's life. He's a mirror that distorts and magnifies the streak of vanity anybody has who works alone as we all do."

His friends protested against this, at least at first. Why, they weren't in the slightest like Starling! They weren't selfish; they were generous. When one of them had a success, the others rejoiced. And yet when Starling approached, his shadow seemed to fall across them. His very presence made them wonder about their sincerity and goodfellowship. He was a reminder that the group would dissolve someday, each member going his way alone, and that no matter what triumphs might lie ahead, the warmth of youth would have vanished forever.

"Starling is mortality," declaimed Sprat (who, it must be noted, was then working on a cycle of graveyard poems). "Starling is the prefiguration of death." That was ridiculous, of course, and everybody laughed, Sprat included. But there did seem to be something in what he said. They really detested Starling—not that anybody literally wanted to have him murdered—and sometimes there rose to the surface an intensity of feeling that was shocking.

"Miserable little rotter," Kearney, the weaver, muttered one day, and he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror behind the counter, where Phoebe painted her prices. He was appalled. His features were contorted and darkly flushed. "Why, it's bloody degrading," he exclaimed. "I've got the face of a damned assassin! I look like I really want to murder that idiot. See what he's done to me?" When Sprat called for the customary sentence of death, Kearney pushed back his chair. "Not for me," he said. "There's something vicious in it, and I don't like it."

Kearney's withdrawal was followed by others. Before long the game was abandoned. The game was abandoned—but the idea persisted. Sprat and the others seemed no more able to rid themselves of the thought of Starling's murder than they could dispose of Starling himself. They considered leaving Phoebe's for another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

place, but they knew Starling would be sure to follow them. They couldn't ask Phoebe to ban him from the premises; as a member of the public he had the right to come. They were, in a way, trapped.

They continued to meet at Phoebe's, but the spirit had gone out of them. Having quit the game, but being unable to free their minds of it, they sat around morosely, making desultory conversation, and often falling into silences. Occasionally they would glance toward the door in resentful expectancy. They were waiting for Starling, as though they had no other purpose in coming together than to listen to his eccentric monologues.

"I'm dreaming about it now," said Werner Lewis, the potter, and he didn't have to explain what he meant. Sprat proposed that they resume the game. "We might as well," he said. No one objected, but somehow they didn't have the energy for it. All they seemed able to do was wait for Starling, loathing him and themselves, but held helpless, as in a spell.

"My God," exclaimed Molly, "we've actually *become* Starling's Circle." Everybody glanced at her, horrified, but there were no protests.

Kearney came in one day pale and agitated. "It's finally happened," he said hoarsely, sinking into a chair. "Bilcock's done it." The regulars eyed him in alarm. "There are two Starlings in Bilcock's gallery." There was a stunned silence.

"You're joking," said Bradley, but feebly. He knew Kearney wouldn't joke about something like that.

"He always said he'd make it," Werner Lewis whispered, "and now . . ." He shuddered.

"And this is just the beginning," Bradley muttered.

They sat mutely contemplating Starling's unworthy triumph. "It's horrible," said Lisa Wells, the dancer. "We'll have to congratulate him."

"I'm damned if I do," Bradley said, twisting a coffee spoon in his fingers. "For anybody else, yes—but not Starling. You know what I'd really like to do?" He glared about the table. "I'd like to carry out the sentence. We all would. Why not admit it?"

He snapped the spoon in two. He stared at it for a few moments, and then sank back, mopping his forehead. "Sorry," he muttered. "I didn't really mean that. I don't know what got into me to say such a thing. I—"

Somebody quieted him with a nudge. Starling was strutting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the coffee shop, crowing with self-satisfaction. "Has everybody heard the wonderful news about Starling?" he cried out. The sour faces around the table didn't bother him. He didn't seem to notice them. "Don't worry," he said grandly, "this won't change a thing. Success won't go to Starling's head!"

He became, if anything, more insufferable than before. He delivered his judgments in a smug, condescending way; those who contradicted him received a tolerant smile.

"I honestly don't think I can stand much more of this," Bradley gritted out to the others one day. "I really can't. Something's got to happen. Something's got to change!"

Something did happen. It didn't happen all at once. It took days; weeks, even. Sprat was the first to notice it. "Do you know," he remarked, "I think he's starting to be a little afraid of us." No one believed him. Starling still swaggered in as always, his conceit and vulgarity undiminished. But as the regulars observed him, they did seem to see, from time to time, a glint of something in his eye—perhaps not fear, as Sprat suggested, but at least a first faint glimmering of an unpleasant awareness.

"Maybe it's getting through to him," Sprat said hopefully. "Not what we feel about him—my God, the man is impervious to the feelings of others—but I mean . . . well, *it*. The idea. The game. The sentence."

They all thought Sprat was talking nonsense. And yet Starling did seem a little different. He had never really looked at them before, just as he never had listened to them, but now he appeared to be watching them, and occasionally listening too—not watching them, exactly, but watching what he seemed to see reflected in their eyes, and listening in that same odd way, as if he were trying to puzzle out the meaning of something he sensed behind their words.

"Do you think he's beginning to see it now?" asked Sprat in wonder. "Do you think he's starting to suspect that we want to kill him?"

There were indignant protests. "Don't be a fool, Sprat," said Molly. "We're not murderers. Of course we loathe him—who wouldn't?—but we don't want to put him to death. That would be monstrous. Nobody should be murdered—nobody, not even Starling."

"Maybe it hasn't got anything to do with us," suggested Sprat. "We could simply happen to be the agents." Everybody looked at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him skeptically. Sprat had a fondness for melodrama. "Starling," he said in a melancholy voice, "bears a curse." This evoked derisive smiles.

"Don't laugh too soon," Sprat insisted. "Isn't it conceivable that a person could be so noxious and reprehensible that he could exude the idea of his own murder, like an odor? Something that hangs about him, that clings to him, that he can't shake off no matter how he tries, something that follows him wherever he goes?"

Despite his brooding manner, his voice shook with hilarity. It seemed absurd—the idea of Starling being hounded by the concept of his own murder, as if it had an independent existence—and yet everything else about Starling was absurd, so why not that?

"The thing came here with him," Sprat went on, "and it took possession of us in order to feed on us and draw the necessary strength to batter its way through that vanity of his and force him to recognize it—to recognize it *again*, I mean, because it must have happened before, in Paris and Rome and those other cities he lived in. Maybe that's why he never stopped in any one place for long. He kept trying to escape it by moving on, but it always followed him, and forced him out again. And so . . ."

He didn't want to say the rest. No one else did, either. If Starling had been driven out of other cities, he might leave London too.

But he didn't leave. He kept coming to Phoebe's every day. Once in a while, true, he would unexpectedly break off, his gaze darting from face to face. His breath would quicken, and he might push back his chair, as though intending to rise to his feet and leave.

"Something wrong, Starling?" someone would ask, and he'd shake his head, and swallow, and run his fingers nervously around his collar, and then, with a little shiver, he'd regain control of himself and go on.

"Your theory's all backward, Sprat," complained Werner Lewis. "If anybody's cursed, we're the ones—and Starling is the curse, damn him. Do you know that Bilcock actually sold those two paintings? And he's taken four more! Why, I can hardly throw a decent pot any more, just thinking about it!"

Bradley slammed his fist down on the table, making the cups jump in their saucers. "I've had enough of Starling," he snapped, getting to his feet. "I don't give a damn what anybody thinks, but by God he's not getting in here today!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He strode to the door and stood there, blocking the entrance. The others followed. "Maybe you shouldn't, Bradley," someone said, but Bradley didn't reply. Starling had turned the far corner, and was heading toward them.

Starling was some twenty paces away when he noticed Bradley in the doorway, with the others crowded around. He glanced at them alertly, with an inquisitive smile. Then a curious transformation came over him. He slowed his step, then he stopped short, the color draining from his face, his eyes staring. His smile remained on his face, but it wasn't a smile any longer; it was a baring of the teeth. He swayed; for an instant it seemed that he might collapse.

Then he began backing away, his eyes still fixed on Bradley and the others. He kept backing and backing until he managed to reach the corner without bumping into anything or falling. There he turned and ran off, out of sight.

Phoebe's regulars remained gaping at the street. "Good Lord," muttered Kearney. "Did you see the look on his face? Was that just an act?" They began straggling back to the table.

"I don't think he was acting," Sprat said.

Werner Lewis disagreed. "He must have been faking it, Sprat. We may not have looked too friendly, but we could hardly have inspired a reaction like that. Why, he bolted off like a rabbit!"

Sprat shook his head. "I don't think we were what frightened him. My God," he said in an awestruck voice, "do you suppose I was right about the sentence? I must have been. It was the sentence he saw in us!"

They resumed their seats, murmuring uneasily in protest against this outlandish suggestion. "It must have been a joke," said Bradley, without conviction. "We can't have gotten rid of him so easily. He'll be back tomorrow, same as ever."

But Starling didn't return the next day or the day after that.

"Maybe he won't come back at all," said Lisa Wells, after a week. "We can talk about something else for a change."

But they kept thinking about Starling.

"You know," said Molly, after a month without Starling, "in a weird sort of way I actually miss him. I wonder where he's gone?"

Kearney confessed that he had made inquiries. Starling was still in London, and still painting. Not only that, said Kearney, but the following week he was to have a one-man show at Bilcock's.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Impossible!" said Werner Lewis. But Kearney had brought proof of this extraordinary news in the form of a catalogue for the show.

"I'll be damned," said Bradley, as they passed the catalogue around in amazement. But in Starling's absence, their spirits had revived, and besides, they were too young to be soured by envy.

"Well, good for old Starling," said Werner Lewis. "I don't begrudge him this—provided he doesn't come back to us."

"Let's all go to the opening," said Molly, and there was a chorus of assent.

"We'll let him know there aren't any hard feelings," said Bradley. "Besides, there may be champagne."

Sprat raised a warning hand. "We shouldn't go," he said. They looked at him questioningly. "We're the ones who passed sentence on him," Sprat said. "We've got to stay away from him now."

Everybody laughed at him. They were thinking about the glamor of an opening at Bilcock's. It wasn't often that anyone they knew had a show there.

"Listen, Sprat," said Kearney, "Starling has forgotten us already—you know how he is. Anyway, we aren't angry at him any more. That sentencing business is a thing of the past."

Sprat persisted. "We may not feel it now," he said, "but it's still in us, all the same. We're the host." The others snickered at this, but Sprat pressed on. "That's what he finally recognized in us—and maybe he knew it would happen. Maybe he knew he had to get rid of as much of it as he could, and then, when it built up in us to the danger point, he would escape and be free of it, at least for a while."

"Honestly, Sprat," said Lisa Wells, "that sounds like one of your tombstone poems."

"Maybe so," Sprat conceded, "but I still don't think we ought to go. *It* wants us to go—and we shouldn't."

Bradley laughed. "I think *it* wants a free glass of champagne, and I shall see that *it* gets one."

"Do you really think, Sprat," asked Werner Lewis, "that the thought of murdering poor Starling is still lurking in us, ready to leap out? Why, that's like possession by devils or something—absolute nonsense!"

Nothing Sprat could say made any difference. They were all determined to go to Starling's opening. Sprat decided that one more wouldn't matter; he would go too.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was the following Friday at dusk when Phoebe's regulars, dressed in their best, entered Bilcock's, which was on the fourth floor of a noble old building just off Oxford Street. Bilcock and Starling had done their promotional work well. The place was crowded, and although Bilcock's wasn't one of the really fashionable galleries, there were some furs and jewels and stiff shirts in evidence, and a scattering of art critics too.

"I'm properly intimidated," whispered Bradley, although he might have shouted, for the gallery was noisy with chatter and the cheerful clink of glasses. Along the walls were ranged Starling's horrible works. The painter himself, being short, was hidden by the throng of visitors, but his triumphant voice could be heard.

"... yes, it's really an outrage, that one," he was exclaiming proudly. "See how that mass of purple seems to slide down at the right? Throws the whole thing off balance, doesn't it!"

Phoebe's regulars exchanged amused glances. That was Starling, all right. He was his old cocky self, swaggering about, all smiles and confidence. "I titled this one 'A Punch in the Nose' because that's exactly the effect it has," he declared. "It's a sort of personal insult in paint."

He caught sight of Bradley and Kearney and the others, but instead of advancing to greet them he slipped off. "Where's he got to?" fumed Bradley, leading the group forward. "Why, dammit, he's cutting us—after all the hours we listened to his drivel!"

Sprat warned them back. "Didn't you see his face?" he told them. "He's frightened of us. Let's get out of here."

Bradley shook off Sprat's grasp. "Don't be idiotic, Sprat. The little toad's simply gotten too fancy for us now—but I'm not leaving until I make him speak to me, at least. Anyway, I haven't had my champagne yet."

He edged through the crowd, making a path for the others. Every so often they saw Starling dodging here and there about the room. "He's terrified, can't you see that?" said Sprat.

"It's your imagination, Sprat," said Bradley angrily. "I'm damned if I let myself be snubbed by that pretentious little monster. Here, Kearney, you and Molly go that way and head him off."

Starling was cornered in the rear part of the gallery. As he saw Phoebe's regulars advancing in a kind of skirmish line, he wheeled and rushed out the emergency fire exit.

"That's going a bit far," exclaimed Werner Lewis. "What the devil's wrong with him, anyway?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sprat tried to stop them. "For God's sake," he shouted, "don't go out there! Leave him alone!"

But they pushed past him and went crowding through the exit and onto a tiny railed balcony where a steel ladder led down the side of the building.

What actually happened no one was able to say for certain because of the darkness and confusion. Starling might have been inadvertently jostled, or he could have been startled when someone struck a match for some light, but it wasn't at all clear whether he had been trying to climb down the ladder (as Bradley thought) or for some obscure reason had been leaning over the balcony railing. In any event, he fell those four stories to the concrete pavement below, and that was the end of him.

They all went to the funeral except for Sprat, who was at Phoebe's when they came back. "Well, we carried out the sentence," Sprat said.

Werner Lewis shook his head reprovingly. "Isn't it about time to drop that, Sprat?" he said.

Sprat was smiling in an odd way. "We hunted him down, all right," he said. "He knew what we were there for."

The rest of them tried to hush him. "You might have a little respect for the dead," said Kearney.

Sprat began pounding on the table with the sugar bowl. "Flattened!" he boomed out in his judicial voice. "Flattened by a fall!" The others stared at him, horrified. "Flattened like a flounder by a fearful fall of fifty feet!" roared Sprat, pounding until the bowl broke.

They finally managed to calm him, by assuring him over and over that it had really been an accident, as the police investigation had determined, and before they broke up to go home, they resolved they'd always keep an empty chair at the table, as a memorial to poor Starling.

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But straw men have a way of falling apart" . . .

FAIR EXCHANGE

by EDWARD WELLEN

Philip Atley went over his client's itemized deductions once more, scrutinizing them in light of the latest tax court rulings, checked the figures again, then signed his name in the proper space on the form. He had taken advantage of every loophole, but he had not ventured into illegality. Whether or not his client or the tax examiner would rhapsodize over the result Atley could not care less. He had done his best for his client and at the same time had not done the United States out of what the laws said rightfully belonged to the government.

A good morning's work. He had earned his lunch. He shoved back from his desk, rose, looked out at the sullen sky and rubbed his hands, anticipating the balanced meal in his habitual restaurant and the brisk march there in the brisk March air. His desk clock informed him it was not yet the clasp of noon; but he had earned that slight indulgence.

He put on his overcoat and homburg, drew on his gloves, and emerged. The sound and sight of his secretary typing away efficiently in his outer office burst comfortingly on his ears and eyes.

"I'm going out to lunch, Miss Quimby."

Martha Quimby barely paused. "Yes, Mr. Atley."

Good girl, that. Though why they called themselves girls when they were well into their fifties was beyond him. Though, to be fair about it, men also called themselves boys—"one of the boys," "night out with the boys"—when well advanced in years. To be even fairer, take himself: he knew himself to be a mature man, yet he knew equally well that boyish traits, ways, and feelings still carried on in him.

In his musing he did not notice that the door to the hall was already opening. And on her part Kay Newcomb, the bubbly young secretary from L. Baxter's law office down the hall, did not notice that Atley was preparing to stride forth as she bounced in,

© *1976 by Edward Wellen.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a double armload of old clothing blocking her view.

She caromed off Atley, teetered to keep from spilling her burden, and giggled her apology. Atley murmured in return, steered safely around her into the hall, and paused outside his office suite to smooth such of his attire as the encounter had disarranged.

He heard Miss Quimby's typing slow slightly. "Kay, you know better than to barge in right now. I told you to wait till lunchtime."

"Oh, don't be stuffy, Martha. It's in a good cause, isn't it? Why should he mind?"

"Mr. Atley's nice enough to let us store the clothing here in his office till we collect enough to make it worthwhile sending it off to the mission. But that doesn't mean he's paying me to be a Good Samaritan. Neither is Mr. Baxter paying you to be one. The least we girls can do is attend to it on our own time."

"Really, Martha, you're carrying conscientiousness too far. What's a few minutes?"

"I'm surprised at you, Kay. But maybe I shouldn't be. You're so young. Still, youth is no excuse for flightiness. As far back as I can remember I've made it a rule to give my employer full value."

Atley nodded to himself approvingly. As he strode away he heard the last exchange diminish.

"Does that mean you're going to let me stand here holding this till the last stroke of twelve?"

"Oh, all right." The typing stopped. "Here, I'll hold the flaps of the box open for you."

"Ah."

He heard the rustling fall of old clothes. Then the typing resumed and he knew it would continue a fraction past twelve to make up for the interruption. He smiled. He held the smile as he passed the open door of Baxter's suite. Baxter, who had evidently been lying in wait for him, called and beckoned him in. "Got something to show you. Come all the way in and close the door."

Atley did so, wondering at Baxter's unusual mysteriousness. He heard his own stomach rumble faintly at the delay, but he maintained his smile. Baxter was a pleasant enough fellow tenant, and they had traded professional insights—legal knowhow for tax expertise—for some years now.

"What've you got, Baxter?"

"Atley, you'll never guess."

"Then I won't try. I see no point in wasting energy on some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing useless. If you want me to know you'll have to tell me."

Whatever it was, Baxter had it in a locked attaché case in a locked file cabinet. When it came to opening the attaché case, Baxter paused as though having second thoughts. Then he gave himself a quick shake of the head and unlocked the case. With reverent care he displayed a block of four postage stamps in a glassine envelope.

"Did you ever see the like in your life?"

Atley stared. He could not find voice to answer. Even his stomach stilled.

But Baxter did not expect or at least did not wait for an answer. "I just bought this block at a private sale from the estate of the previous owner. The widow might've got more by holding a public auction—indeed, I'm certain she would've got more, much more—but that would've meant waiting and she needs spot cash. An hour ago I handed over a cashier's check for I'm ashamed to say how much. In a few minutes I'll be putting this block in a bank vault."

Atley found his voice and it sounded strange in his own ears. "I didn't know you collected stamps, Baxter."

"We big-time enthusiasts tend to keep our passion secret. We shy away from publicity so that the underworld—or other enthusiasts—won't rip us off. But this acquisition is too great a prize. I just couldn't keep it to myself. Saw you pass by and knew I could trust you. Well, Atley, what do you think of my prize? It's a beauty, isn't it?"

Atley reached for the glassine envelope but Baxter pulled it back.

"Don't be offended, Atley, but I'd rather you didn't handle it. So easily damaged, you know. Ruin the value. Condition is almost everything."

"Quite right, Baxter. I can see it well enough from here." He studied the colors—red frame and black center—and the old-fashioned-looking design. He shook his head slightly, his eyes gimbaling to stay on the block. "It's valuable, is it? You wouldn't think so to look at it. What makes it so valuable?"

Baxter laughed. "Look closer. Notice anything peculiar about these stamps?"

Atley bent nearer. "Why, the plane in the center is upside-down in relation to the frame. Unless it's supposed to be making a loop-the-loop?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Baxter laughed again. "No, Atley. It's not supposed to be making a loop-the-loop. But you've spotted the peculiarity that makes this so valuable. This is the famous 24-cent airmail invert error. There is only one sheet in existence, and this is a corner block of four from that sheet. Well, what do you think now?"

Atley's eyes did not leave the block, but they lost focus. "Strange, the values in this world. I can imagine someone purchasing that original sheet at the post-office counter and, ignorant of the value of such an error, indignantly handing it back to the clerk and demanding a perfect sheet."

Baxter shivered at the thought. "Please." Then he mused in turn. "I suppose we enthusiasts do have an upside-down set of values and tend to lose our sense of proportion. But when you consider the span of a human life as against the vastness of infinity, and take into account the small amount of enjoyment one can hope to squeeze into this one life, who's to say our enthusiasm, whatever it might be, is out of proportion? So, to me, it's not so strange. To you, I suppose, these are mere bits of paper. But to someone like me, with a secret passion for collecting—why, there's no telling what another collector wouldn't do for these."

Atley managed a smile. "Really? Tell me, Baxter, from your enthusiasm for these—er—bits of paper, I take it you wouldn't consider selling them? Say at a ten percent profit?"

"I should say not! Never!"

Atley laughed and threw up his hands. "I give up. I can see your passion goes deep. Stick to it, by all means. But I hope for your sake you're taking precautions in carrying it to your bank."

It was Baxter's turn to laugh, scornfully. "Here's the only guard I need." He whipped out a gun.

"Careful, Baxter. Are you sure you have the safety catch on? Mind if I look at it?"

Atley took the gun, eyed it, released the safety, shot Baxter through the heart, put the gun down, picked up the glassine envelope, and pocketed it carefully. He made sure to insulate it from his body heat by interposing the letter he had been meaning to answer—the letter from his vacationing wife; he would hate to damage the glue and reduce the block's value.

That done, he eased out the suite's side door. Just in time, for he heard Kay Newcomb bounce in on her platform shoes through the suite's front door. Then unobserved, he took the stairs down to the street.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It would be asking for detectival notice if, on this day of days, he broke his routine in the slightest. So, though he pulsed with the urge to rush his acquisition to his own bank's safety-deposit vault, he walked at his normally brisk pace to his favorite restaurant.

He forced himself to swallow the suddenly tasteless food with his usual prim gusto and to take his usual digestive leisure. Then he paid up, making his usual small talk with the owner's wife at the cash register, and returned to his office at his usual time.

Miss Quimby greeted him with unusual vivacity. "Oh, Mr. Atley, you missed all the excitement! Someone shot Mr. Baxter dead while you were out to lunch!" She remembered the proprieties. "Isn't it terrible?"

"It certainly is, Miss Quimby. Someone told me about it coming up in the elevator and I saw the policemen when I passed poor Baxter's suite. What happened?"

"The police haven't found any motive or any witness or anything. The closest to a witness seems to be Kay—his secretary, Miss Newcomb, you know. The police are waiting to question her again after she gets over the shock. Poor Kay. She must have got back to her office right after it happened. She smelled smoke, and knew Mr. Baxter doesn't—didn't—smoke, and it seemed sharper than cigarette or cigar smoke. She knocked on his door, and when Mr. Baxter didn't answer she went in."

Atley frowned. "Smoke?" Then his brow smoothed. "Ah, yes. Gunsmoke."

"That's what it must have been. Anyway, she found him on the floor with a bullet hole in his chest. She ran here screaming. I'm the one who phoned the police. They're questioning everyone in the building. I imagine they'll get around to you. They already questioned me."

"And what could you tell them?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid. But one of the detectives said they can tell who fired a gun by the powder traces it leaves."

"Is that so?" He looked thoughtful and put his hands behind his back. He worked his gloves off, gazing at the heap of old clothing in the corner behind her desk. He brought a naked hand around and pointed a finger at Martha Quimby. "I'll bet you've missed lunch, Miss Quimby. How do you plead? Guilty or not guilty?"

She blushed. "That's true. In all this I entirely forgot. And now I don't know if I feel like eating."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Nonsense! I order you to go. And I insist that you take your full hour."

"Thank you, Mr. Atley."

As soon as he was alone, Atley buried his gloves deep under the dresses, blouses, shirts and trousers of the mission clothes. He smiled to think of some African or Polynesian village chief laying claim to the pearl-gray gloves.

Even more secure behind the closed door of his inner office, he gloated over the block of postage stamps. He studied his treasure lovingly. Beautiful. The world would never know it was in his possession. Correction—till after his death. But then it would matter as little to him as it now did to Baxter. What mattered was that while he lived he would enjoy owning the treasure.

Time passed. With a start he heard Miss Quimby's typing begin again. He looked at his clock and smiled. She had taken her hour to the second.

Her typing stopped almost as soon as he became aware of it. Someone had come in. A pair of someones. Two male voices. The police! Quickly Atley put the block in his desk drawer.

Miss Quimby used the intercom to tell him they were there and would like to see him. He picked up a tax return and rose as they came in. They introduced themselves as Detectives Tausch and Barrett and he shook their hands. Only one of them did the talking.

Maybe Mr. Atley knew a motive? They hadn't found one yet.

Atley shook his head in sorrowful bafflement. "Baxter was the mildest, most inoffensive person you'd want to meet. I don't know of any enemies he might have made. And I can't even picture anyone killing him."

"Well, someone did." Maybe Mr. Atley saw someone suspicious lurking in the corridor when he went out to lunch?

Atley weighed whether or not to say he had indeed seen some unsavory type lurking in the corridor. That would focus suspicion elsewhere but it would be a strain on him to keep his story and description consistent under determined questioning, and it would keep him too much in the company of the police.

True, if he stayed close to the investigation he would know how it was going. But straw men have a way of falling apart. Even to say he had heard loud voices when he passed Baxter's suite would involve him too deeply. No, on the whole it was better to stick as close to the truth as possible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, I can't say that I did."

Well, if Mr. Atley should remember anything that might in any way throw light on the case would he please get in touch with them?

"Of course."

He saw them out. His heart broke its rhythm as Tausch—or Barrett—paused to glance at the pile of old clothing.

Miss Quimby also intercepted the man's glance and proudly explained the worthy charity.

Barret—or Tausch—lost interest. "Oh." Both detectives nodded their thanks and left.

Shortly after, Atley told Miss Quimby he was going down to consult with a client, Mr. Murphy on the eleventh floor. If anyone called, he was out for the rest of the day.

This was not too much of a break with routine. It often proved easier for him to go where the records were kept than for the client to lug bulky ledgers to him.

And since this consultation looked as if it would take a while, he wished Miss Quimby a good night; she was to go straight home and drink warm milk and not think too much about what had happened. Because he did not put on his hat and coat he gave Miss Quimby no reason to think he would do other than visit Mr. Murphy.

But what he actually did was go all the way down and slip out to the bar in the building next door. What he had done had started to hit him hard.

He had another and another—till with a start he made out it was past five P.M. With exaggerated sobriety he left the bar and returned to his now darkened office. He let himself in, locked the door again, and switched on his desk lamp.

Sight of the block of stamps would reassure him it had been worth what he had done to gain it. He opened the drawer. He stared down at three quarters, two dimes and one penny.

And a note. "Dear Mr. Atley. I ran short of postage for the mission parcel, which I am depositing in a package box on my way home—straight home as you thoughtfully suggested, rather than around to the post office—and have taken the liberty of scrounging through your desk. Luckily I found four 24¢ stamps, making a total of 96¢. I leave this exact amount in exchange."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a NEW police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

When a world-famous mycologist dies of amanita poisoning—well, as Lieutenant Decker said, "We certainly have reasonable grounds for an investigation." So Mitch Taylor and Ed Balenky of Homicide were assigned to it—The Case of the Absent-Minded Professor.

It has been said that home is where the hat is—but sometimes homicide is where the hat is . . .

P AS IN POISON

by LAWRENCE TREAT

When somebody says, "Seize a mushroom where my hat is," and then goes into a convulsion, you don't exactly kiss it off. And Mitch Taylor, Homicide, was right there in the hospital and practically watched him conk out. Amanita poisoning, they said—from a poison mushroom.

The way Mitch got involved was, he'd gone to see Perkins, who'd been hit during that shootout in the diner, and Mitch was on his way out and walking down the corridor when he saw the name P. Jefferson Regis stuck into the nameplate on the door, so Mitch went in.

You could tell right off the professor was in a bad way and somebody ought to be there with him. A minute or so before the nurse would have been in the room and chased Mitch out, but she'd gone down the corridor to check with the doctor or something.

Anyhow, the professor was lying there, and he mumbled at Mitch who bent down and just about managed to make out the words. You could tell the professor wanted to make sure Mitch understood what he was saying, so Mitch repeated it real slow. "Seize a mushroom where my hat is. Is that right?"

© 1976 by Lawrence Treat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Regis muttered a yes and then sighed, like they'd finally taken a bag of cement off his chest. For some reason or other he stuck his hand out, only he missed his aim and all he did was knock his glasses off the bed table. Mitch picked them up, and then the professor went into his convulsion. Mitch yelled and the nurse came running, and that was it.

Mitch had met him a couple of years before. He was a tall guy with a long flat nose, and he examined you like he was trying to dope out the best way to label you. You knew right off he was a professor. Maybe on account he had glasses on with those thick lenses and was wearing a plaid hat with a feather stuck in the band.

Where Mitch ran into him was in a park, what they called a wildlife preserve, and not many people went there. The Taylors wouldn't have either except Amy had this idea it was all wrong for Mamie and Joey to grow up just city kids, so for a year or so they all went out to the country every Sunday, and this time it was in this park.

They were picnicking there and Mitch was sitting down and resting because he'd tripped over a root and fallen flat on his kisser, and he was a little shook up. Mamie had just picked up a mushroom and stuck it in her mouth. Amy spotted it and grabbed the kid and was cleaning out her mouth and telling her not to eat toadstools, when the professor came through the woods and heard Amy.

"Young lady," he said, "there's no such thing as a toadstool. The word is an Anglo-Saxon slander on the particular kind of fungus known as a mushroom, and it is to the shame of our society that we concentrate on Agaricus bisporus and disdain all other species. And now would you show me what the child was eating?"

Mamie still had one of the things in her hand and she went up to the professor and showed it to him.

"Perfectly harmless," he said, after examining it. "Not particularly tasty, but it will do no harm." And with that he beat it.

Out in the parking lot later on Mitch described the guy and asked the attendant who he was, and the attendant said, "Him? That's P. Jefferson Regis." And even without that monicker you could tell he was somebody important.

The morning after the hospital business, Lieutenant Decker held his regular session in the squad room. There wasn't much doing, just some follow-up on a couple of cases, including the shoot-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out that had winged Perk. So, like always when they were about finished up, the lieutenant asked if there was anything else, and Mitch spoke up.

First off he told about the incident in the hospital and then he said, "But what bugs me is those glasses of his. I saw him a couple of years ago and his glasses had those thick heavy lenses, but what I picked up in the hospital had windowpanes. Straight glass, nothing else."

Nobody had much to say about that, but the lieutenant sort of frowned, puckered up his lips, then picked up the phone and called the hospital. When he hung up, he looked like he'd given ten-to-one odds on a ball game and lost.

"Regis died last night," he said, "and the M.E. says the cause of death was amanita poisoning." That didn't mean much to the gang here, so Decker went on. "An amanita is a variety of mushroom, and any mycologist—mycology being the study of mushrooms—can tell an amanita from an edible mushroom the way you guys can tell a pistol from a shotgun. And Regis was a world-famous mycologist. So we may or may not have a homicide, but we certainly have reasonable grounds for an investigation." He frowned some more. "I knew Jeff Regis," he said, "and while he was absent-minded and a little eccentric, so what? Not enough reason for him to get bumped off."

Mitch agreed with that all right, but he shut up and waited for the lieutenant to go ahead.

"Taylor," the lieutenant said, "why don't you and Balenky go up to the Regis house and see what you can find out? There ought to be something."

Mitch looked up the address—it was way out on the edge of the city—and got car Number Four as usual. Ed Balenky was too short for most police departments but Decker was more interested in what you could do than in how tall you were. And while Balenky had one of his cheap cigars that would fumigate a whole house, he hadn't lit up yet. So he and Mitch talked about what was the best beer and how much dough the big shots pulled down and whether anybody had any business eating wild mushrooms in the first place.

What with the sun being out and the thermometer in the seventies and staying put, about the only question to decide was whether to report back before lunch or whether to string it out to around the end of the afternoon. And while they didn't discuss the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

oblem, they were pretty well agreed. If the thing wasn't on the p-and-up they'd push it and get right back to the lieutenant. therwise, what was the hurry?

The Regis house was a big three-story affair with porches and irrets, and some of the windows had colored glass. You'd go oke heating a joint like this and you practically needed a com-uter to figure out the number of rooms. The dame who opened ie door, she looked like she'd just come over from Europe in a owboat and was still a little seasick.

After Mitch and Balenky identified themselves and asked who ie was, she answered in a voice that sounded like a bass fiddle. ," she said, "was Mr. Regis' housekeeper, and I see no reason for etectives to enter a house of mourning."

"We just want to find out when he ate that poison stuff," alenky said.

"The poison stuff," she said, "was apparently an amanita, which e had for lunch last Monday."

"Who cooked it?" Balenky asked.

"Mr. Regis always prepared his own mushrooms," she said.

"Yeah," Mitch said. "I knew him, he was famous, and it's a lit-le hard to understand how come he didn't know an amanita." Iitch sort of choked over the word, but when she started to peak, he cut her off fast. "So if you'll help us out, Miss—"

"Mrs.," she said. "Mrs. Cora Vincent."

"So we need all the help we can get. Anybody else here?"

That got him past the door, and she took him and Balenky own a hall that looked like a record shop, what with the stuff tacked up to the ceiling. But if the corridor was a record shop, he rest of the house looked like a public library, with books all ver the place and most of them second-hand.

There were two guys in the living room where the Vincent emale announced Mitch and Balenky. One of the guys had a eard like U. S. Grant's, but the other guy was youngish and rim, with a build that would have tagged him as an athlete.

He stood up and introduced himself. "I'm Dave Regis," he said. Jefferson Regis was my uncle. And this is Mr. Stephen Ogden, a riend of my uncle's. He owns a big mushroom farm. Is there any-hing we can do?"

Mitch started off trying to find out how come the professor had aten the deadly amanita, and after untangling what Ogden and)ave and the Vincent dame had to say, what it came down to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was, Regis had gone mushrooming last Monday morning. He'd went to the wildlife preserve and got back in time for lunch. He always wore a Rex Harrison kind of hat, a plaid thing with a chicken feather stuck in the band, and that feather was pretty special. It came from a hen of his that could peck at poison mushrooms and somehow get away with it. Anyhow, he'd been wearing the hat when he left, only nobody'd seen it since and it wasn't around the house.

"When I saw him late that afternoon," Dave said, "he was excited. He'd found an Amanita Caesarea, unusual for this area. Caesar's mushroom, it's called."

Mitch did a double take on that one. Seize a mushroom—Caesar's mushroom. The two hooked up and made sense. So where things stood was, the last thing Regis had thought about was something about a Caesar's mushroom and that you could find it where he'd dropped his hat.

With that under his belt Mitch tried to find out where the professor usually went mushrooming, which turned out to be in that wildlife park. He had a few favorite spots, and the Vincent female knew where they were.

The next thing on Mitch's list was finding out exactly where Regis ate his poison mushroom, and how come a guy like him could make such a mistake. Only what could you get out of three people all in the same room and all hell-bent to prove they weren't involved? They all had different ways of saying they couldn't have had anything to do with a poison mushroom, they weren't anywhere near the professor, they loved and respected him, and they were all pure, innocent, public-spirited citizens. And with the three of them sounding off, it was no cinch to straighten things out.

All Mitch was sure of was that the professor had gone mushrooming on Monday morning about nine o'clock. Nobody had been around when he got back, but later on the Vincent female had cleaned up the pan he'd cooked his mushroom lunch in. Nobody had eaten any mushrooms after that time, and particularly not after the professor had got sick.

Mitch figured one of the three had stuck a poison mushroom in that pan when the professor wasn't looking. So the next question was where they'd all been at lunchtime on Monday. They had it down pat. The Vincent female, and the way she took over, she was a lot more to the professor than just his housekeeper—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anyhow, she said she couldn't drive so she used a taxi and had the same one all the time. The driver, his name was Max and he could prove when she left and when she got back, and she had a hairdresser and a butcher and a grocery clerk all lined up to prove where she was every minute from ten A.M. until the middle of the afternoon. Which was the kind of alibi Mitch didn't go into and didn't expect to. Because what for, when she could have snuck back for lunch and then beat it out again, and nobody except the professor to say she hadn't.

Dave Regis' alibi wasn't that clear—he hadn't prepared it as thoroughly as the Vincent dame, but he said he'd gone to the local library. He taught history back home, was just visiting here, and there was some original stuff in the library he wanted to look up about Ernestine Rose, a great feminist, ever hear of her? Mitch hadn't and wasn't interested, so he cut the guy off.

Like Mitch expected, Ogden wasn't around the house when the professor ate that mushroom. Ogden had been at the bank all morning. He was on a visit here because the professor had developed a way of cultivating some wild mushrooms. They tasted better than the kind you bought in the stores, so there was a fortune in marketing a new delicacy, and Ogden and the professor were going partners in the venture. But before that Ogden had to arrange about the financing. The professor was a top mycologist, one of the greatest; he had a few new species he'd discovered and had named after him, but what he knew about business you could put in a matchbox and it would still be empty.

The way Mitch and Balenky worked it, Mitch concentrated on the alibis and lined up where everybody was on the crucial day, while Balenky played dumb and asked how you could tell a poison mushroom and what types of mushrooms there were and what they looked like. Junk like that.

The three of them, or anyhow Ogden and the Vincent female, all they wanted to do was straighten Balenky out on mushrooms. The Vincent female seemed to be the expert. She brought out a pile of books and showed pictures, and Balenky made like all he wanted in the world was to learn. He just about had them thinking that mycology was his dish and he had a new life starting up. Would they lend him a book? Could he have this one? Would they write stuff down for him?

From what they told Balenky, it seemed that Caesar's mushroom was one of the best. The Romans knew all about it and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caesar was nuts over it, which was how it got its name. There were good amanitas and bad amanitas, and they were easy to tell apart if you knew anything at all about mushrooms.

"This thing," Balenky said, pointing to the picture of the Caesar, "what does it taste like?"

"I've never eaten one," Ogden said, "but I'm told they're first-rate."

"So are the poison ones," the Vincent female said. "Everybody that ever ate any remarked on how good they tasted. And Mr. Regis told me, shortly before he went to the hospital, that he'd had a delicious lunch—sautéed mushrooms with a touch of curry."

With that the three of them began arguing about the best way to prepare mushrooms, which was the signal for Mitch and Balenky to beat it.

Driving back to headquarters, they compared notes. "The three of them," Balenky said, "they all got their alibis set up because they think it's a homicide. And I guess I'll go along with that."

"Me too," Mitch said. "Any idea which one did it?"

"Not me. How about you?"

"No dice. But the way the professor told me about the mushroom and the hat, instead of telling them, shows he suspected one of them. And they all know plenty about mushrooms, and some of them sound like pretty good eating."

"Not to me," Balenky said. "I hate the stuff."

Later on, sitting down with the lieutenant, they summed up what they'd found out. Decker, listening, leaning back in his swivel chair and letting it squeak, wrote his notes down on the backs of envelopes. When there was no more room on them. he scooped a crumpled hunk of paper from the wastepaper basket and jotted down something else.

"Here's what that Caesar's mushroom looks like," Balenky said, opening up one of the books they'd lent him. "Sort of orange on top, maybe a little red in it, with a yellow stem."

The lieutenant studied it. "Brother!" he said. "I don't get it. What we have is a distinguished mycologist eating a poisonous amanita. Presumably they switched glasses on him, but why didn't he holler? Why did he wait until he was dying, and then tell somebody who just happened to come into his room that Caesar's mushroom was where his hat was? And if he ate a Caesar's mushroom, why did he die? And the plaid hat with a feather in it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where is it and what makes it so important?"

When the lieutenant shot off his mouth like that, you let him answer his own questions. Why wear out your mind when he'd do it for you? So Mitch shut up while Decker went into a huddle with himself and came out with, "Well, it looks like the next step is to find the hat. Any idea where he went mushrooming?"

"Probably that park," Mitch said. "The wildlife preserve."

"Vincent—Ogden—Regis. Taylor, you take Regis. Balenky, you can have Ogden, and I'll turn Bank onto Vincent. Skip the briefing tomorrow morning and go straight to the Regis place. I want to know what each of those three does and where he goes."

When Mitch got back to his apartment that evening, Amy had this cake she'd baked and topped off with icing, and now she was squeezing some colored stuff out of a tube and writing *Happy Birthday* with it.

Mitch kissed her and said, "Birthday? Whose?"

"It's for Naomi, upstairs. It's her little boy's birthday and I said I'd bake the cake."

"But the colors," Mitch said, staring at them. "Where do you get them?"

"In any supermarket. Why?"

"Funny thing," he said, "but they're the same colors as Caesar's mushroom."

"What are you talking about?"

"So if you took a mushroom, a white one like some of the poison kind, you could paint it with this stuff, and if you couldn't see too good on account you had the wrong glasses, and if the shapes of the two mushrooms were pretty much alike, you'd get fooled, wouldn't you?"

"Paint a mushroom?" Amy said, puzzled. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"Never mind," Mitch said, feeling like he'd broken up the ball game with a homer in the bottom of the ninth. "Wait till I tell the lieutenant about it!"

Mitch got up early because he had to get out to the Regis place before Dave decided to take a walk in the woods. Instead of his usual bus, the one that got Mitch to headquarters around nine, he took an earlier one. He didn't know the driver, so Mitch showed him his badge so he could ride free.

"Homicide Squad," Mitch said, on account the words were a sort of magic that always got him a little extra attention.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The driver kind of perked up. "You working on that poison mushroom case?" he said. Mitch nodded, and the driver said, "I was reading about it. A pretty smart trick, painting a poison mushroom so it looked like it was a good one to eat."

"Huh?" Mitch said.

"But you guys were even smarter, figuring it out."

"Who told you that?"

"It's here, in the paper. Want to look?" And the driver handed Mitch the morning paper.

It was there on the first page, how P. Jefferson Regis, the famous mycologist, had died of mushroom poisoning. Then came the part that knocked Mitch for a loop.

"Lieutenant William Decker, Chief of Homicide," it said, "theorized that the only way in which an expert mycologist could have made such a mistake was if his vision had been impaired and then a poisonous amanita had been painted to look like a harmless one. Any ordinary vegetable dye, bought in a supermarket, would do the trick."

Mitch handed the paper back. "Yeah," he said. "We're one up on them every time." And he moved to the rear of the bus and sat down.

Somehow it always turned out like that. It was like stealing third, and then you had to go back on account of a foul tip. So maybe he ought to stop thinking and do just what he was told. Because it looked like the dumber he was, the better. So all he was going to do today was make Dave Regis. If the guy went anywheres, Mitch would tag along. If the guy wanted to tell him anything, Mitch would listen, and that would be the size of it. Let the lieutenant do the thinking. Let him guess why the professor gave Mitch that message. Chances were the professor didn't believe he was dying just before the last convulsion, and then he spoke to the first person who came along.

But let the lieutenant figure it out. All Mitch wanted was that regular paycheck of his. That did him fine.

At the city garage they gave him Number Four, same as usual, and he drove out to where the Regis house was. Bankhart was there ahead of him, parked in somebody's driveway, and Mitch could see Balenky hogging the best place in the area, where there was a kind of turn-around practically out of sight of the Regis house, but where you could keep an eye on it. The result was Mitch had to park on a side street a block off, then walk up and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down the sidewalk until his dogs gave out.

The first thing happened was, this taxi came to the Regis house, waited maybe a minute or so, then the Vincent dame came down the path and got into the cab. It was just pulling out of sight when Bank took off after it. Next, a blue coupe came out of the garage, with Dave Regis driving. So Mitch hoofed it back to Number Four, got in, and started off.

You tail a guy in light traffic and you can usually stay with him without his catching on. Same thing in heavy traffic, except it's tougher. But when there's nothing else on the road and the guy has an idea he might have a tail on him, you're a dead duck. And that's what was happening now, because Dave speeded up, then slowed, then stopped cold, which Mitch had to do the same thing.

After that Dave knew Mitch was onto him, so what Dave did was head for town, then shoot down a side street, and by the time Mitch made his turn, Dave was out of sight. And where he'd gone was like trying to locate a kid when he's in a crowd yelling their heads off on the other side of the grandstand. So all Mitch could do was make a guess, and he guessed Dave had gone out to that wildlife preserve and would leave his car in the parking area.

Mitch was right on that one, which was his first good break of the day. But the thing was, do you wait around for the guy to come back, or do you guess where he went and probably miss him out there in the woods? What Mitch did was to go over to Dave's car and disconnect the ignition wire. Whatever happened, Dave wouldn't be leaving that parking lot for a little while—not on wheels, anyhow.

Mitch wasn't exactly a woodsman. He'd been brought up on the streets, and the only forests he'd seen were in the movies. Still, you learn a few things here and there, and he remembered how, that day Mamie had chewed on her mushroom, he'd told her and little Joey that when you went into the woods you had to notice where the sun was and you had to spot a few landmarks. That way you don't get lost.

Mitch followed his own advice and, on account he didn't know where else to go and the three of them had said yesterday that mushrooms come up in the same place year after year and the professor knew where; so Mitch figured he might as well go to the spot where he'd first met the professor.

The trail was easy to follow, and it was covered with pine nee-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dles. So he walked soft and didn't make any noise, which was lucky because when he tripped over the same root in the same place as that other time, nobody heard him. He kind of staggered, lost his balance, and grabbed hold of a tree.

Without that he'd never have noticed the feather. It was kind of brownish and part of it was broken off, but he was in real luck. On account when he got down on his knees and examined the ground, he found the smashed eyeglass lens, and then a little farther off was part of the frame. The hat and the rest of the frame he couldn't locate, but any optician could figure out whether the lens was the same as the professor used. And with that and the feather, Mitch was pretty sure the professor had fallen right here. And either Dave or Ogden or the Vincent female could have had a hand in it; they could have come out here with the professor and given him a shove, then rushed off so's they'd have an alibi. And the professor would figure he'd had an accident, that he'd caught his foot on a root and flopped over.

You couldn't say for sure he'd been pushed, but if you painted a mushroom so's the professor couldn't tell it was doctored, you wouldn't just hope he'd fall down and bust his glasses. You'd help him along by pushing him or knocking him down, and then you could step on his glasses. And from what Mitch had in his hand, that was just about what must have happened. Except where was the hat?

Mitch stuck the lens and the busted frame in his pocket. Chances were that the perpetrator would show up here with the idea of finding and destroying the evidence, now that the police were onto him. So if Mitch had any sense he'd keep off the trail and make sure nobody would see him. He'd just wait around for something to happen, making like a Boy Scout playing Indian, and it was a good thing he did. Because when he got to the clearing that he remembered, there was Dave taking it easy. He was sitting on the ground and leaning up against a tree, and he had a plaid hat on his knees, and with no feather on it, either.

He hadn't seen Mitch or heard him, and Mitch made sure he wouldn't. Still making like a Boy Scout, Mitch got down on his hands and knees and crawled off to where there were a bunch of trees and some underbrush. He kind of made himself comfortable, and while he couldn't see Dave too good, he could see enough to notice if Dave got up and went away. Which he didn't.

For a while not much happened. Mitch got a mosquito bite, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an ant or something crawled up his leg, and he heard some kind of a bird and then a plane went by, pretty high up so you couldn't see it. It was like that for a half hour or so before Ogden came down the path. First you heard somebody whistling and then he stepped on a branch, which gave Mitch plenty of time to drop down on his belly until Ogden went by. He was walking fast, like he knew where he was going and knew what he was going to do, but after a few seconds he went out of sight, and from then on all Mitch got was what he was able to hear.

Dave must have stood up when Ogden reached the clearing, because when Mitch got up he couldn't see Dave any more.

Ogden was the first to speak. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting," Dave said. "For you."

Ogden must have thought that one over, because he didn't say anything for a few seconds. Then he said, "What made you think I'd come here?"

"It was easy to figure out. I found Uncle Jeff's extra glasses in your room."

"If you did, you put them there."

"He had two pairs of glasses," Dave said. "I located one pair in your room, in a bureau drawer. I don't know what happened to the other pair."

"Just what are you implying?"

Mitch could have answered that one pretty easy, but Dave went ahead and spelled it out. "You read the paper this morning, didn't you? That homicide lieutenant figures out exactly how Uncle Jeff was fooled. When I located the second pair of glasses in your room, it was pretty obvious you were the one who'd done it, so I came here, examined the ground, and found the stains of vegetable dye on some of the grass. In fact, there's still a painted amanita over there near the oak. Uncle Jeff must have missed that one. Anyhow, I was pretty sure you'd come here sometime today and make sure there was no evidence the police could find."

"Just what reason could I possibly have for wanting to kill your uncle?"

"He'd found out how to raise a better mushroom and to do it commercially. If the competition wouldn't ruin you, it would cut pretty deep into your profits."

"We were going into partnership."

"That's what you claim, and you probably told exactly that to the banker last Monday morning, after you'd come here with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Uncle Jeff. But Uncle Jeff never said anything to me about it, and I think you made up the whole story."

"And I think *you* killed him. You probably inherit plenty from him, and how much do you make as a schoolteacher? Peanuts! Furthermore, if you didn't think up and carry out this whole poison scheme, how do you know all about it?"

They went on like that, each of them accusing the other, and getting nastier all the time. Mitch figured they were building up to a fight and he'd better step in, break it up, and arrest one of them. But which one? Balenky was nowheres around, on account Ogden must have shook him off, same as Dave had shook Mitch off. And while Mitch could collar *both* Dave and Ogden, on either assault or disorderly or whatever, Mitch told himself he ought to be able to figure things out from what was happening now.

Then it hit him that if Dave was guilty, he'd have got rid of the evidence instead of just sitting here. He'd have cleaned up the vegetable dye and taken the feather and the busted eyeglasses as well as the hat.

With that settled in his mind, Mitch got up and walked into the clearing. And the way it worked out, he got there just in time to stop what would have been a pretty good fight.

He felt on top of the world when he walked into headquarters with his prisoner, but what he had to say didn't exactly bowl over the lieutenant. Because the first thing the lieutenant said was that he had a warrant for Ogden's arrest on a homicide charge.

"Once I'd figured out the painted mushroom caper," Decker said, "all we had to do was ask around and see who remembered anyone buying that particular color of vegetable dye. It turned out it was bought at a small place in the North Woods section, and the clerk identified Ogden from his picture. And we located the optician who made up the windowpane glasses. It's a good thing you brought Ogden in. What were you going to book him for?"

"Homicide," Mitch said. "I located the spot where the professor was pushed or knocked down and his glasses broken, and I could pretty well spot it because that's where I found this chicken feather from his hat." And he handed Decker the feather.

Lieutenant Decker examined it real careful before he spoke. "Chicken?" he said. "This comes from a pheasant."

You win some, you lose some. That's the way it goes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* con-man series by

FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

Do you like con-man stories? Well, here is the first of a new series—a con-man story "with a difference." Meet Milo Turner, once The Reverend Doctor Callixtus Huckaby (among other aliases), and Turner is more than a con man. He is also a first-rate detective.

And there is another difference. The caper takes place in The Matchwit Club where you will be challenged by not one but two riddles—a double game of wits for double pleasure. But we warn you: Milo Turner, con man and detective, has a Perry-Mason turn of mind . . .

THE MATCHWIT CLUB

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

The last time I'd met the young lady my name had been The Reverend Doctor Callixtus Huckaby and the game had been to inspire the governing board of the Central Missouri Christian Educational Council to contribute sixty thousand greenies to the building of a new fundamentalist college. Which existed, of course, in my nimble mind only.

As part of the game I'd wangled myself an interview on a St. Louis radio talk show. The young lady had been the show's hostess, a tall lithe blonde named Nanci Newell whose bored but pleasant face topped a smashing body. What she was doing running a talk show on a tiny Missouri radio station owned by a gaggle of fire-and-brimstone types had been beyond my comprehension, and I couldn't ask her for fear of blowing my pious cover.

The next four months I devoted to the sweet life on Manhattan Island. Luxury apartment in a Ninth Street highrise, gourmet meals daily, elegant foreign films (subtitled not dubbed) in cozy

© 1976 by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little theaters uptown, hit Broadway shows, and beautiful women after dark. It was October when I decided the Bible-thumping money was getting a bit low and I'd better start planning the next con.

Long walks help me think clearly, and on the cool autumn night I saw her again I was headed uptown on the west side of Madison Avenue. Breeze heavy with promise of rain, streetlight reflections glistening like little moons in the puddles from the last shower, long empty vista of office buildings stretching north, a few owl cabs cruising the streets. Suddenly a tall cool blonde in an off-white trenchcoat came gliding out of the doorway of a towering glass advertising hive and linked her arm in mine as if she'd known me all her life. "Hello again, Milo Turner," she said, and smiled gravely at me.

To say that my stomach did an instant turnover would be an understatement. I prefer the public to remember me in the various personae I assume from time to time, and I get uptight when I'm addressed by the name I was born with. For a panicky moment I thought of trying to convince her that The Reverend Doctor Callixtus Huckaby had fallen among the fleshpots. Then I got my wits back in gear, assumed the most bewildered look I could muster, and said, "Madam, I regret to say I don't know you and I don't think you know me."

She gave me a knowing and infectious grin. "I know you better than you realize, Milo Turner. Oh, don't worry, I'm not a threat to you. We're more or less in the same line of work."

Had Women's Lib invaded the profession of clipping the ungodly? I was aghast at the changes in nomenclature this development might lead to, and police designations like confidence person and swindless (swindlette?) swam like spots before my eyes. In complete command of the situation she steered me deftly across Madison and east on one of the Forties.

"I didn't realize who you were until you'd taken off with the sixty thousand," she went on. "Here's a nice *intime* little bar—you may buy me a liqueur. You bollixed my own pitch royally, you know; the governing board got so cautious after you stung them that there was no way I could take them for cent one. That's why you owe me. Chocolat Suisse," she ordered as a mess-jacketed waiter hovered over our red plush banquette.

I asked for Drambuie and a cup of black coffee, and as I sipped the golden elixir and felt the mild glow chasing away my abdomi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nal butterflies I began to savor the girl's combination of winsome openness and devious indirection. Beneath the trenchcoat she wore a blue and white minidress that looked patriotic against the red cushions.

"You're still wondering where I know you from and you're still afraid I'm a cop or something," she said. "I guess I've been mysterious long enough. Remember the Camino Vista Hotel in Palm Springs, oh, about twenty years ago? By the pool? I was the little kid with Fred Schuyler who swam like a fish."

A wave of sudden nostalgia drenched me, for that blazingly sunny weekend when we quietly planned one of the great coups in the history of our profession had been one of the highspots of my life. If you can imagine how an amateur moviemaker would react to an invitation to collaborate with Orson Welles, or how the newest second lieutenant out of West Point would respond to an opportunity to discuss grand strategy with the ghost of Douglas MacArthur, you can appreciate my feelings when foxy Fred Schuyler, the ace of aces, invited a callow youth named Milo Turner to share in a scheme that needed a bright kid.

We'd worked out the details that weekend at the Camino Vista. Schuyler had had a little girl with him, a beautiful child about five years old, brown as toast all over. She had more or less lived in the hotel pool while Fred and I were planning. He hadn't explained why he'd brought the girl and I hadn't dared to ask him. Now she explained without my asking.

"I guess I was something like an adopted daughter to him." She took another sip of her rich dark liqueur. Tiny bits of solid chocolate stuck to the bottom of her glass. "When I was a few weeks old he found me abandoned in the back of a Greyhound bus and decided to keep me for a while like a good luck charm and we sort of grew attached. He paid for all my schooling but we hardly ever saw each other because he was always in the middle of a con or lying low after he'd made a score. I took off on my own a few years ago and we sort of lost touch and then last January he had a coronary and died."

"I was out of the country when it happened and didn't hear about it till later." I lifted my glass in a small salute to a great con man. "He'd retired from the profession, hadn't he? Was running a supper club here in New York?"

"The Matchwit Club," she nodded. "Max Gantry runs it now, he and Fred were partners in the club."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I narrowed my eyes in a squint of puzzlement. The word on the street was that Max Gantry had some kind of connection with Angelo Menza's piece of the dirty side of crime. Exactly how the connection worked was a mystery, but taking in Gantry as a partner was an odd way to retire from the profession.

"Your face says you don't think much of Max," she continued. "I don't either. I think he's stolen more than a hundred thousand dollars that Fred intended for me. That's why I need you. I heard you were in town and I've spent most of the last week trying to get hold of you. When Fred retired from the profession he had a lot of money saved up. He used some to buy the club, and the rest he put away in about a dozen different accounts in banks all over the country and a couple in Mexico, each one with a different phony name. The last time I saw him, he said if anything ever happened to him he wanted me to have the money, and the key to the bank names and account numbers and the phony names the accounts were in was somewhere in his office at the club. That's the only clue he ever gave me."

"He couldn't have wanted you to have the money very badly," I commented, "if that's all he told you."

"No, that's not true. He was superstitious, I guess, the way some people are about making a will. Giving me all the facts would have been like admitting he was going to die. And then you have to remember that Fred was a puzzle nut. He loved riddles and word games and tried to get me to read Poe's stories and the old fair-play detective novels and I just never went for that sort of thing. Telling me no more than what he did was Fred's way of challenging me to a game of wits.

"But damn it, he was too clever for me! I've been through that office on the sly four times—it's Max's office now—and I couldn't find anything. That's why I think Max has already found it and he's probably draining those accounts by mail withdrawals, little by little. Fred must have carelessly dropped some hint before he died, and Max solved the puzzle. Either that or I'm just stupid. All right, you're supposed to be a puzzle lover yourself. I want you to get into that office and come up with something. I'll cut you in for one-third of whatever we salvage, and Fred told me originally there was about ten thousand in each of the accounts."

A dozen accounts would mean a share of $40,000 for me, unless of course Gantry had depleted the accounts down to a shadow. I thought it was worth taking a chance on and we joined hands in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

agreement. Her fingers were long and cool and competent.

"Just a few questions now, to make sure I understand the situation," I said. "How did you get the chance to search the office four times?"

She hesitated and her face took on a sort of pinched expression under the low indirect lighting of the bar. "I'm not as good a con woman as I thought," she answered slowly, "so I make my bread working for a kind of escort agency. I found out Max calls the agency when he's lonely, so I paid the woman in charge a hundred dollars to assign me to him. That was four months ago. Now he calls me direct, and he likes me to stay over. I've been able to make an impression of his office key and have had a duplicate made. Here it is—it's yours for the duration." She rummaged in her white leather purse and detached one key from a ring. "Any more questions?"

"One," I said. "Without passbooks and identification in each of the phony names, what good are the names and account numbers of the banks?"

She licked at her lips with a still slightly chocolate-coated tongue. "The best document forger in the east," she replied, "is only a few subway stops away."

First item on the agenda was to learn all that was knowable about the layout of The Matchwit Club. I'd never been inside the place but knew it by reputation as most New Yorkers did. It had the soft lights, soothing music, overpriced food and liquor that are par for the course, but this Manhattan supper club had an attraction unique to itself, namely its owner. Every night at 11:00 P.M. he would step up onto the circular platform in the center of the main room and the baby spot would bathe him and the drummer would bang a few beats and the game would begin. Fred Schuyler had started the tradition and Max Gantry was carrying it on, propounding a puzzle to the audience every night, with the house picking up the tab of the lucky customer—if there was one—who could match wits with the management and win.

Over the next three days I pumped Nanci for every detail she could remember about the club—physical layout, location of the bandstand and kitchen and rest rooms, colors of the waiters' jackets, number of chairs per table. A certain café society columnist I knew, who would sell his uncle for a few quarts of Chivas Regal, provided additional information about the target. When I was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through I could have put together a scale model of the joint. Max Gantry's office was at the end of a short corridor opening off an unobtrusive door in the far wall of the main supper room. The office door was kept locked at all times, but thanks to Nanci's bedside manner that obstacle didn't faze me.

"Watch out for one thing," she cautioned. "Every so often when Max isn't around he stations that bodyguard of his in the office—Porky Goulart, I think his name is. He looks like a bloated corpse but he weighs over three hundred pounds and he could break you like a toothpick."

"I doubt he'll want to tangle with a black belt in aikido," I murmured confidently, and as an abstract proposition I'm sure the statement was true, although my personal knowledge of that martial-arts discipline was limited to the idea that it was the same as karate but different.

Tuesday afternoon the jacket of my midnight-blue suit came back from Solly the friendly theatrical tailor, so that night I was ready for my first pass. I made a phone reservation for nine P.M. and arrived at the East 55th location precisely on time, with gray contact lenses concealing my eye color and a neatly trimmed salt-and-pepper wig topping my natural hair. My table was about halfway between the archway leading into the supper room and the circular platform from which Max launched his riddles.

I ordered a Scotch sour on the rocks and followed the drink with a medium-rare Chateaubriand, with chives and bacon bits on the baked potato, and the house dressing on the salad. Shortly before eleven, the bill paid, I was sipping black coffee and awaiting Max's entrance. The baby spot focused and the drum rolled and suddenly there he was, tall and tuxedoed and suave as a celluloid secret agent, with his high forehead, neat little mustache, and a sort of hooded look around the eyes as if he were keeping some heavy thoughts from the rest of the world.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to The Matchwit Club." He spoke into a tiny mike around his neck, and amplifiers concealed in the wall decorations threw his voice around the high-ceilinged room. "The story I'm going to tell you tonight was one of the favorites of my dear old friend and partner Fred Schuyler. I suppose you might call it an It-Couldn't-Have-Happened story. If one of you here tonight can tell me how it *did* happen—well, you know the rules of the game. Whatever you and your party eat and drink tonight is on the house. Are you ready?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sock it to us, Maxie!" roared a liquor-sodden baritone from a table behind me.

"One fine afternoon in Central City, U.S.A., three gentlemen stepped into the lobby of the Acme Hotel and requested a room for the night. 'We have a very nice room on the fourteenth floor,' said the clerk. 'How much will it be?' asked the men. 'Thirty dollars,' said the clerk. 'Payable now,' he added when he saw the three had no luggage. Each of the three men peeled off a ten-dollar bill from his roll and gave it to the clerk. Then all three went upstairs in the elevator.

"About an hour later the clerk realized that he'd overcharged the men, since the correct price for that room was not thirty but twenty-five dollars. He took five singles out of his cash register, rang for the bellboy, and instructed the boy to take the money up to the three gentlemen in 1414. The bellboy, while riding up in the elevator, took two of the five singles and stuffed them in his cap.

"When he reached Room 1414 he explained to the three men that the actual room rate was twenty-seven dollars, not thirty, and that the clerk had overcharged them three dollars. Then he handed each a one-dollar bill, bowed politely, and left. Now those are the facts, ladies and gentlemen. Do you all understand what happened?"

A chorus of assent exploded from the audience.

"Each of the three men originally paid ten dollars. Right?"

"Right!" a few voices echoed.

"And each of them got back one dollar, right?"

"Right!"

"So that the net result was that each was paying nine dollars for the room, right?"

The logic of the question seemed to elude a few of the chorus. The "Right!" that echoed back this time was noticeably lower in volume.

"Now nine times three is twenty-seven," Max went on smoothly, "which is the number of dollars the men wound up paying for the room. Right?"

There was dead silence in response; the audience was losing its nerve. So far I couldn't detect the gimmick, even though I'd had considerably less to drink than most of the patrons. And right there I saw the principle on which The Matchwit Club worked. Everyone drank too much because everyone hoped he'd beat Max

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the game and have his entire evening's bill torn up. But the very act of drinking too much fuddled everyone's wits so that they couldn't beat Max! It was a beautiful bit of con-man psychology and I filed it away for my own future use.

"And twenty-seven dollars plus the two the bellboy pocketed makes twenty-nine. Right?"

A few none-too-confident voices threw back the Right at him.

"Now which of you ladies or gentlemen cares to tell me *what happened to the thirtieth dollar*?"

Max spread his hands palms out as if to show that the dollar wasn't on him. There was about half a minute of absolute silence, then a buzz of whispers erupted from all parts of the supper room at once as people put their heads together and tried various solutions on each other.

I had to concede that I was in the presence of a master. Gantry had that entire roomful of people as much under his control as if he'd hypnotized them. Plates of outrageously high-priced food grew cold, drinks stood untouched, coffee unsipped. Finally a tall fortyish woman in a see-through evening gown lurched to her feet, mounted her chair clumsily, cupped her hands around her mouth, and shouted her solution at the circular platform. "The, ah, the bellboy dropped it on the floor of the elevator!"

Max bowed his head slightly as if at a graveside. "I'm sorry, madam, that is not correct." The woman flopped down into her seat dejectedly.

An old man with thinning white hair stood up to make his try. "One of the three men only paid the clerk nine bucks to begin with," he suggested.

"No, sir, that's not correct either. You'll recall I distinctly said that each of them paid with a ten-dollar bill."

I saw a few more hands in the audience tentatively raised and decided that now was the time. As quietly as I could I vacated my table and sauntered in the direction of the men's room. My hunch was right; it was empty. The run on the john would begin as soon as the game was over.

I locked myself into a cubicle and doffed my wig and secured it against my calf with rubber bands. My dark four-in-hand flew out of my shirt collar and was replaced by a bright red bow tie. I turned my midnight blue jacket inside out so that it was now a fire-engine red jacket, courtesy of Solly the wizard tailor, and tucked the tails up the back with safety pins. In a few blinks of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an eye I had become indistinguishable in dim light from the two dozen waiters who served the tables of The Matchwit Club.

The next few moments were tricky. The hired help had their own sanitary facilities off the kitchen, so that if I were caught in the paying customers' john wearing a red jacket I would be, to put it mildly, in trouble. I ran to the exit door of the men's room and opened it just enough to see a bald fat man on his feet trying to explain his solution and Max politely trying to cut the man off and give someone else a chance.

I slid out of the room quick as a red rabbit and sauntered over to the bar, where I palmed a pad of service checks and picked up a drink tray from a waiting stack. Then I visited the far corner of the bar where I told the mixologist I had an order for two cognacs. By the loud groans that came from the supper room I could tell that Max was calling a halt to the proceedings.

I headed back for the archway into the supper room, the drink tray nicely balanced on one palm. The crowd gave Max a loud if somewhat grudging hand as he swept off the platform in the direction of the entranceway and the waiters spread out around the room to take the thirsty multitude's post-game drink orders. With a waiter's deliberate speed I moved in toward that unobtrusive door which led to Max's sanctum. When I'd gone as close as I dared, I ditched the drinks at a temporarily vacant table—when the occupants returned from the restroom they'd find and no doubt enjoy an excellent cognac they'd never ordered—and slipped through into the short corridor. The sound of silence greeted me, and a great block of worry slipped off my shoulders. No Porky Goulart anywhere in sight.

I'd seen Max leave a few minutes ago and knew from my friend the sodden society columnist that he always left for the night right after the game, so that he wouldn't have to contend with a lot of post-midnight quarterbacks disputing the fairness of the evening's riddle. I tiptoed down the carpeted corridor, past a closed door on either side, and worked Nanci's duplicate key into the lock of Max Gantry's office.

There was a dim nightlight plugged into one wall; I didn't dare risk anything brighter. There was no time to search the place thoroughly, but Nanci had tried that four times and got nowhere. What I was hoping for was some kind of clue to the location of Fred's bankbooks. There had to be one, unless Max had already found it and deep-sixed it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I adjusted my eyes to the dimness and gave the place a quick once-over. It looked like a thousand other offices. Massive conference desk, a deadly-looking paperknife with a Buddha handle lying on the blotter, walnut-stained file cabinets along the far wall, a Xerox machine under windows connected with an electronic security system, an advertising calendar from a law firm hanging on the wall between two tall bookshelves.

And suddenly everything went *click*, and in one split second I saw both the solution to the puzzle Gantry had posed outside and to the riddle Schuyler had posed inside.

There is no such thing as an advertising calendar from a law firm. It is a violation of the canons of professional ethics for lawyers to advertise. I learned that several years ago during a caper in which I had to convince three totally corrupt attorneys that I was a member of their profession.

I yanked the calendar from the wall, crossed to the Xerox machine, and thumbed the On button. The innards of the big duplicator began to hum softly. I lifted the cover above the lens and slid the calendar pages in one after the other and hit the Print button twelve times in under a minute.

Just as I was finishing I heard a noise that turned my spine into a stalactite. The sound of a flushing toilet. Within ten feet of me. Damn it, damn it! Porky Goulart *was* on watch tonight, only he'd had to visit the bathroom which must be behind one of those two doors along the corridor. At best I calculated I had 30 seconds. I slapped the cover down on the lens and bundled the Xerox copies under my jacket, quickly stuck the calendar back in its place on the wall, locked the office door behind me, and flew up that corridor like a red tornado. I made it with maybe four seconds to spare, thanking the patron saint of con men as I turned into a high-class waiter for the two minutes it took me to meander gracefully into the foyer, past the hat-check girl's stand which was conveniently vacant, and out in the cool dark delicious safety of a New York City street after midnight.

Gray streaks of dawn were beginning to chase the darkness out of my bedroom before I was able to turn my brain off and catch a few winks. The ringing of the phone on the night table was like a series of shotgun blasts going off a few feet away. I sprang upright in bed, cursed, saw that it was 8:23 A.M. by the alarm clock, and groped for the handset. "Joe's Fish Market and Massage Par-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lor," I growled. "What the hell do you want?"

"It's me," she said. "Chocolat Suisse." That was in case I was still too sleepy to recognize her voice, I supposed. "I couldn't get to a phone last night. Max is going out of town for a few days first thing this morning. How did you do?"

"Don't know yet," I said. "It'll take a few days to check some things out. Just follow your normal routine till you hear from me."

Two hours later, fully awake, organized and with a hearty breakfast under my belt, I strolled a few blocks south and west of my highrise, through the diagonal pathways of Washington Park to the cool brick fortress of New York University School of Law. The law library took up the east wing of the building. For the next two days the library was my home away from home. I'd picked up enough legal research techniques during that caper with the lawyers so that I thought I could handle that part of the job myself. It took me four or five times as long as it would have taken a lawyer, but the gain in keeping my find strictly to myself was worth the loss of time.

When I was finished, I collected all my notes and papers, came out of the law school into a brisk sunshiny day, miraculously found a pay phone that worked, and called Nanci to invite her to my place at five in the afternoon for drinks and a progress report. That left me a few hours to look for confirmation that my deductions were right.

After a quick lunch in a basement bistro on Washington Place I subwayed downtown to the financial district. The lower Manhattan branch of the Farmers' and Traders' National Bank was a gray stone monstrosity a few blocks east of the World Trade Center. I sat in the hideous magenta visitor's chair next to Marty Scanlan's desk in the big open area across from the tellers' cages where banks like to position their loan officers.

Marty was tall, thin, intense-looking, and wore wire-rimmed specs that made him resemble an assistant professor of something dreary. I gave him ten bank names, ten human names, and ten account numbers and told him I needed verification that each account existed and the amount deposited in each. I didn't tell him why. I didn't need to. He owed me. A few years back I had returned to him, without charge, some photographs taken by a couple of amateur blackmailers and illustrating certain of Marty's gambling activities which banks are likely to frown on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As a matter of commercial policy a bank ordinarily will not tell you how much is in an account unless you can prove you are the depositor. Trying to get that information over the phone is a waste of breath. But there is a way—if you happen to know, as I did, a loan officer at a local bank who owes you a favor. Loan officers have access to the huge computerized credit-checking system that comes into play whenever someone signs up for a bank loan. Any bank in the country will honor another bank's request for the status of an account if the query is transmitted over the computer as a routine credit check.

I leafed through some banking journals that contained the dullest prose I'd read all year while Marty fed the data into the computer. In half an hour he came back to his desk with the answers. Each of the ten American accounts existed. The two Mexican banks weren't tied into the computer network but if I was right on the first ten accounts I was likely to be right on the two south of the border. The smallest of the ten had a $56,000 balance and the fattest was well up into six figures.

When my head had bounced back from the ceiling and resumed a more stable position between my shoulders, I began to tease out the implications of those hefty numbers. Marty squinted anxiously at me through his specs. "Milo? You okay? Need a glass of water?"

I stared dumbly at the sheet of scratch paper in my hand that had the list of banks and names and account numbers in my writing and those crazy huge amounts in his. "You got a copying machine?" I muttered.

"In the secretaries' office."

"Run off a copy of this for yourself," I told him. "And for God's sake don't lose it till I tell you to."

Now the whole thing made sense. We'd been afraid Max was slowly depleting the accounts, but the fact was he had added to them, in some cases more than ten times the original amount. And considering that Fred Schuyler's two Mexican bank accounts were also in the system, I could come up with only one explanation, an explanation that also explained Gantry's mysterious connection with Angelo Menza. Max was using Fred's system to launder money for the mob.

The idea of using forged documents to get Nanci's money out of the accounts had just become about one million times more dangerous. I did some mental thrashing around, trying to devise a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

substitute plan. All I could come up with was a vague notion of somehow making Max withdraw the amount we wanted and voluntarily hand it over to us. The more I thought about that the sillier it looked. I hopped a cab back to Ninth Street and paced my living-room rug, waiting for Nanci.

At ten to five the annunciator buzzed and I pushed down the Talk switch. "Milo?" her voice came out of the speaker. I pressed the Open switch to get her into the vestibule. A minute and a half later there was a timid knock on the door and I threw it open for her.

And for Max Gantry and another gentleman who looked like a ton of suet and who could only be Porky Goulart. They stood behind Nanci, each holding one of her arms ungently. "They made me come," she whispered. Porky's free hand held a nasty-looking automatic.

"Welcome to my humble home," I said inanely. "Come in, sit down, stay a while." I backed away from the door as a sort of invitation. A pair of hands seemed to be tying granny knots in my stomach but I had to look as if I was in command of the situation. If I didn't I was dead. My memory raced back in time, trying to see if I could have made some mistake that had led them to Nanci and me. Then I had it, and I released a few choice epithets. "The calendar," I muttered. "When I hung the calendar back on your wall—"

"You were in a hurry and forgot to fold back the leaves so that October was uppermost," Max finished for me in a voice like velvet. "When I went down to the office this morning and saw January facing me I knew I'd had a visitor while I was out of town. And I was reasonably sure the visitor had a key. And I could think of only one person who might have had access to my key."

He swung his hooded gaze to Nanci who stood forlornly against the wall, chafing her arms. "We persuaded her to tell us the whole story, Turner. And now I think we'll just sit here till it's nice and dark, and then we'll all take a ride to a deserted spot I know."

"You can kill us if you want to, Max," I said with as much nonchalance as I could muster. "But if you do, your laundry operation for Angelo Menza dies with us and they'll have a contract out on you before the end of the week. Angelo doesn't like bunglers."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I didn't give him a chance to absorb the stuff I was hitting him with. I reached gently into my hip pocket for the billfold where I'd stuffed the sheet of scratch paper with all the bank data and passed it over to Gantry with a little flourish.

"Just to show you I know all about those accounts—everything but the amounts in the two Mexican banks and I could get those with two phone calls. Now I made three copies of that sheet you're holding and gave one to each of three friends of mine. If I don't call my friends at eight every night and eight every morning till further notice, they each have instructions to turn their copy over to the F.B.I. along with an explanation of what those accounts mean to Angelo."

I kept up the stream of lies as fast as I could invent them. "Now we're not out to destroy the mob or break you, we just want the money Fred Schuyler intended Nanci to have. It was well over a hundred thousand but we'll settle for a hundred, forty thousand for me and sixty for Nanci, that was our deal." At least it was now. "You lose nothing that was yours to begin with, you keep the club, you keep the laundry operation, and we beat it with our take."

Under cover of my patter I'd been slowly edging across the room and now I was in position, facing Porky Goulart. I timed the kick to the end of my final sentence and put all my weight behind my foot. The toe of my shoe caught Porky square on the kneecap. He howled. I kicked his other kneecap and he crashed down like a gaffed hippo. A few gentle stamps on his gun hand convinced him to let go of the automatic. I scooped it up and covered Max with it. He took a few steps back with hands half in the air.

"Don't worry," I reassured him, "I'm not going to shoot. The deal I offered you still goes."

Max stood motionless as a museum statue for about a half minute, his jaw muscles bunched up tight. Then he opened his mouth and let out a long breath, and the tension in the room began to dissolve. "Deal," he said quietly. "Let me make a couple of phone calls and I'll have the money for you tonight. Let's get our business done quickly. I have to come up with a new riddle before eleven o'clock."

The man had iron control, I'll give him that. Personally, I felt as if I'd lost a gallon of sweat in five minutes. While Nanci kept Porky covered with the automatic I lurched to the bar cabinet and poured two gargantuan shots of Scotch to seal the agreement. . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Whatever hint Fred Schuyler carelessly dropped to Max, it wasn't the calendar," I said. "Max still has no idea how it's gimmicked or why I took it off the wall. If any cop with really sharp eyes ever visits him in that office, Max is kaput." It was after two A.M. and we were unwinding over brandy at an all-night lounge in Chicago's O'Hare Airport. We had finished packing by the time the money had been delivered and we'd spent the last several hours leaving false trails, just in case Max decided to renege on the deal. Nanci was booked on a night flight to Toronto and I'd decided to hole up in San Francisco.

On the flight from JFK to O'Hare I'd explained how the calendar code worked. For each month of the year, six or seven dates were marked as important in legal history. For example, the box for March 8 read: "1841: birth of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes," and February 9 read: "1803: Supreme Court hands down *Marbury v. Madison* decision."

Some of these statements were historically accurate and others weren't—I learned at the NYU Law Library that the *Marbury* decision had come down on February 24—but the important point was which dates were filled in, not their accuracy. If great legal events were attributed to April 4, 9, 17, 18, 23, and 29, it meant that the account number was 497839, the first digit of all two-digit dates being irrelevant.

The name of the bank and the fictitious depositor could be found very simply. Each of the twelve sheets of the calendar contained one completely fabricated legal reference. For instance, June 17 read: "1934: *Denver First National Bank v. Theodore Donahue* decided by Supreme Court." The alphabetical table of cases in the Decennial Digest series, which I'd consulted at NYU, had told me that there never was such a decision. Twelve banks, twelve depositor names, twelve account numbers, one to a month.

Nanci swirled her brandy in its snifter. "There's only one thing you haven't explained. You said you solved Max's riddle about the three men in the hotel at the same second you recognized the calendar as the key to the code. Just how did you do that? And what *is* the answer to the riddle?"

"There is no thirtieth dollar," I explained. "It's a matter of false mathematics. There only *seems* to be an extra buck because of the way Max told the story. Change the way of telling the story slightly, and all thirty dollars are accounted for. The correct room rate is twenty-five dollars. The bellboy returned three, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

makes-twenty-eight, and kept two, which makes thirty."

She lifted her glass in something of a toast to me. "And you caught on to that while you were prowling Fred's office?"

"Remember, Max said that riddle was one of Fred's favorites. And there on the wall of Fred's office was a variation of the same technique—giving the appearance of existence to something that doesn't exist. Sheets of paper giving the illusion of a normal calendar, a stream of words giving the illusion of an extra dollar. A pattern. Old foxy Fred at his wiliest in both cases. A good con man's trick, like the paperwork I once used to create The Reverend Doctor Callixtus Huckaby's Bible College."

We had a last drink to the memory of Fred Schuyler, who in different ways had been a sort of father figure to both of us. Then I walked Nanci to the security checkpoint, kissed her goodbye, and told her I hoped we could work together one of these days.

"We will," she said confidently.

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* detective story by

EDGAR WALLACE

first publication in the United States

April 1, 1975 marked the 100th anniversary of Edgar Wallace's birth. To celebrate the centenary there were BBC TV programs on Wallace's life, considerable radio and press coverage, and reissues of some of his books—according to Penelope Wallace, his daughter, about 50 Edgar Wallace titles are still in print and selling well. And to commemorate the Edgar Wallace centenary, though belatedly, EQMM brings you an Edgar Wallace story never before published in the United States—a tale told by the "Sooper" involving "a real bit of detective work." As always in Mr. Wallace's stories, you will find his smooth, easy style and his quietly persuasive economy of characterization.

Another Superintendent Minter story, also never previously published in America, will appear in EQMM soon . . .

A MORE-OR-LESS CRIME

by EDGAR WALLACE

"It's a strange thing," said Superintendent Minter, "that when I explain to outsiders the method and system of criminal investigation as practiced by the well-known academy of arts at Scotland Yard, they always seem a bit disappointed.

"I've shown a lot of people over the building, and they all want to see the room where the scientific detectives are looking at mud stains through microscopes, or putting cigar ash in test tubes, or deducting or deducing—I don't know which is the right word—from a bit of glue found in the keyhole that the burglar was a tall dark man who drove a gray touring car and had been crossed in love.

Copyright 1975 by Penelope Wallace.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I believe there are detectives like that. I've read about 'em. When you walk into their room or bureau or boudoir, as the case may be, they give you a sharp penetrating look from their cold gray eyes and they say, 'You came up Oxford Street in a motor-bus; I can smell it. You had an argument with your wife this morning; I can see the place where the plate hit you. You're going on a long journey across water; beware of a blue-eyed waitress—she bites.'

"I believe that the best way to detect a man who's committed a crime is to see him do it. It isn't necessary even to see him do it. In nine cases out of ten the right man will come along sooner or later and tell you he did it, and what he did it with.

"Most criminals catch themselves. And I'll tell you why. Not nine out of ten, but ninety-nine out of every hundred of these birds of paradise don't know where to stop, and as they don't know where to stop they stop halfway. I've never met a crook who was a whole hogger and could carry any job he started to a clean and tidy finish. There never was a burglar who didn't leave something valuable behind, but that's understandable, for burglars are the most nervous criminals in the world. They lose heart halfway through and there's a lot of people like 'em. As Mr. Rudyard Kipling, the well-known poet, says: 'All along of doing things/Rather more or less.'

"The most interesting more-or-less crime I ever saw was the Bidderley Hall affair. Bidderley Hall is a country house in the Metropolitan Police area—right on the edge of T Division near Staines. It was an old Queen Anne house—it's been pulled down lately—standing in a ten-acre park, and it was owned by a gentleman named Costino—Mr. Charles Costino. He was a rich man, having inherited about half a million from his brother Peter.

"In the beginning Peter was rich and Charles was poor. Peter boozed but Charles never got happy on anything stronger than barley water. Charles was artistic and knew a lot about the Old Masters; he never bought any but he knew about 'em. His brother Peter knew nothing except that two pints made a quart and two quarts made you so that you weren't responsible for your actions.

"As a matter of fact, he was a bit of a bad egg, Peter was—gave funny parties at his home in Eastbourne and was pinched once or twice for being tight when in charge of a motorcar.

"One morning the coast guard found Peter's car at the foot of a two-hundred-foot cliff, smashed to blazes. They never found Peter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The tide was pretty high when his car went over—about three in the morning, according to a revenue boat that saw the lights; and after a time Charles got leave to presume Peter's death and took over all that Petter had left of a million.

"I saw Peter once. He was one of those blue-faced soakers who keep insurance companies awake at night.

"It was a grand bit of luck for Charles, who had this old house on his hands and found it a bit difficult to pay the taxes.

"When he came into money, Charles didn't live much better than when he was poor. The only time he broke out was when he took in a man-of-all-work, who was butler, footman, valet, and fed the chickens. In a way it was not a good break, as I could have told him if I had only known him at the time.

"Mr. Costino, it seems, had had an old lady looking after him—I forget her name, but anyway it doesn't matter. She'd been in the family for four generations, and she either left to better herself or died. Whatever she did she bettered herself.

"Anyway, Mr. Charles Costino was without a servant. He only lived in four rooms of the house since he came into the money and there wasn't much cleaning to be done, but he did have a bit of silver to clean, and there were the chickens to look after. The silver used to be locked in a cupboard in the dining room and was pretty valuable, as I happen to know.

"Now, the new man he employed was named Simon. He's no relation to anybody you know, and I very much doubt whether that was his real name at all. He was a graduate of the University of Dartmoor where he had spent three happy years at the taxpayers' expense. I knew him as well as the back of my right hand.

"One day, by accident, I was passing through the Minories and I saw Simon come out of a shop that buys a bit of other people's silver now and again, so I pulled him up. According to his story, he had been to this pawnbroker's shop to buy a ring for his young lady, but they didn't have one to fit. I know most of the young ladies Simon has promised to marry—they've all been through my hands at one time or another—but I've never met one that he bought anything for, except a bit of sticking plaster. So I took him back to the shop, and the fence blew it and showed me the silver Mr. Simon had parted with.

"It was not in my division at all and perhaps I had no right to interfere. To tell you the truth, the Divisional Inspector was a bit nasty about it afterwards, but what made it all right for me was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when Simon said it was a cop and volunteered to come back with me to Staines.

"He didn't want any trouble and he told me he was tired of working for Mr. Costino and would be glad to get back amongst the boys at the dear old college. He said he had sold four pieces and had six hidden in the house ready to bring away.

" 'Costino wouldn't notice them going,' he said. 'He's soused half the time and the other half he's in delirium tremens.'

"It was news to me, because I didn't know that Costino drank.

"We drove from the station to the house in a cab and on the way there Simon told me how slick he'd had to be to get the stuff out of the house at all. Apparently he slept in a room over a stable, some distance from the house but on the grounds. Nobody slept in the house but Charles Costino.

"We drove up to the Hall—and a miserable-looking building it was. I think I told you it was a Queen Anne house. Queen Anne is dead and this house was ready to pop off at any minute. None of the windows was clean, except a couple on the ground floor. It took us a quarter of an hour to wake up Costino and even then he only opened the door on the chain and wouldn't have let us in, but he recognized me.

"I have never seen such a change in a man. The last time I saw him he was a quiet sober feller and his idea of a happy evening was to drink lemonade and listen to the radio. Now he was the color of a bad lobster. He stared at Simon, and when I told him what the man had told me, Charles sat down in a chair and turned gray—well, it wasn't gray, but a sort of putty color.

"After a bit he said, 'I'd like to speak to this man. I think I can persuade him to tell me the truth.'

"I don't like people coming between me and my lawful prey, but I humored him, and he took Simon into the other corner of the room and talked to him for a long time in an undertone.

"When he finished he said, 'I think this man has made a mistake. There are only four pieces of silver stolen, and those are the four pieces he has sold. I can tell you in a minute.'

"With that he unlocked the door of a high cupboard. It was so crowded with silver that it was impossible for any man to count the stuff that was in it. But he only looked at it for a minute and then he said, 'Quite right. Only four pieces are missing.'

"So far as I was concerned it didn't matter to me whether it was four or ten, so long as he gave me enough for a conviction. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not my business to argue the point. I took Simon down to the cooler and I could tell something had happened, because he was not his normal bright and cheery self. Usually when you take an old con to the station he is either telling you what he's going to do when he comes out to your heart, lungs and important blood vessels, or else he's all friendly and jolly. But Simon said nothing and sort of looked dazed and surprised. He was hardly recovered the next morning when I met him at the police court and got my remand.

"It was a very simple case. It came at the Sessions, and Mr. Costino went into the box and said Simon was one of the best servants that had ever blown into a country house. You expect perjury at the Assizes but not that kind of perjury. But that was his business.

"Anyway, Costino made such a scene about what a grand fellow Simon was, how he fed the chickens so regular that they followed him down the street, that Simon got off with six months, and that, so far as I was concerned, was the end of it till it came my turn to take him in again.

"About seven months after this I was on duty on the Great West Road, watching for a stolen motorcar. It was one of those typical English summer days you read about—raining cats and dogs, with a cold north wind blowing—and I was getting a bit fed up with waiting when I saw a car coming along following a course that a yachtsman takes when he is tacking into the breeze.

"The last tack was against an iron lamp standard, which smashed the radiator and most of the glass, but it didn't apparently kill the driver, for he opened the door and staggered out. I had only to look at him to see that he had had about twenty-five over the eight.

"My first inclination was to hand him over to my sergeant on a charge of being drunk while driving. It would mean a lot of bother, because if he had plenty of money he'd produce three Harley Street doctors and fourteen independent witnesses to prove that the only thing he'd drunk since yesterday morning was a small glass of cider diluted with tonic water.

"I was deciding whether or not to pinch him when I recognized him. It was Simon.

" 'Hello!' I said. 'How long is it since *you* came out of the home for dirty dogs?'

"He didn't know me at first, and I oughtn't to have known him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at all, because he was beautifully dressed, with a green tie and a brown hat, and a bunch of forget-me-nots in his buttonhole, not that anybody who had ever put their lamps on this dial would ever forget him. When he didn't answer I asked him if it was his car, and he admitted it was.

"While I was talking to him one of my men came up and told me that they had stopped the stolen car about a hundred yards down the road, so I was able to devote myself to my little friend.

"We helped him along and got him into the substation round the corner. He was, so to speak, flush with wine. He got over his shock and began to talk big, flash his money about, and gradually, as he recognized the old familiar surroundings—the sergeant's desk and the notice on the wall telling people not to spit on the floor—he saw he was in the presence of law and order and it gradually dawned on him that I was me.

" 'What bank have you been robbing?' says I.

"He laughed in my face. 'Costino gave it all to me for saying that I only pinched four bits of silver.'

"He started to laugh again and stopped. I have an idea that in the thing he called his mind he realized he had said too much. Anyway, he wouldn't say any more. We took his money away from him, counted it, and put him in a nice clean cell.

"Now I am not a man who is easily puzzled. Things in life are too straightforward for anybody to have anything to puzzle about, but this certainly got me thinking. Costino must have given him the best part of a thousand pounds to admit that he had stolen only four pieces of silver. Now why did he do that?

"I thought it out. At about eleven o'clock that night I said to my sergeant, 'Let's go and do a real bit of detective work.'

"I drove him down in my car to the road in front of Bidderley Hall. We parked the car in the drive, just inside the old gates, and walked up to the house. The rain was pelting down. I don't remember a worse night. The wind howled through the trees and gave me one of those bogey feelings I haven't had since I was a boy.

"When we got up to the house, we made a sort of reconnaissance. All the windows were dark; there was no sign of life; if there had been any sound we couldn't have heard it anyway. We went all round trying to find a way in, and just as we got back to the front of the house one of the worst thunderstorms I can remember started up without any warning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My sergeant was all for knocking up Mr. Costino and putting the matter to him plump and plain, but I saw all sorts of difficulties and my scheme was to pretend that we found a window open and being good policemen and not being able to make Costino hear, we had got in through the window and had a look round. There was only one place possible, we decided, after we tried every window on the ground floor, and that was a window on a small balcony at the back of the house.

"We searched round and found a ladder, and put it against the balcony. I went up first and I had just put my leg over the parapet and was facing the window when there came a blinding flash of lightning that made my head spin. It was one of those flashes of lightning that seem to last two or three seconds, and in the light of it, as plain as day, I saw right in front of me, staring through the window, a horribly white face with a long untidy beard.

"I was so startled I nearly dropped back. I called my sergeant up the ladder. I wasn't afraid, but I wanted somebody with me. I don't know whether you have ever had that feeling. Two can be frightened to death better than one.

"I told him just what I had seen, and then I got my pocket lamp and flashed it into the room. As far as I could see through the dirty window the room was empty. Between the window and the room was a set of iron bars. They weren't very thick; they looked like the kind put up in West End houses so that children can't escape from a nursery when the room catches fire.

"We got the window open. The sergeant and I not only bent the bars, but we bent the whole frame. It was not very securely fastened—a bit of carpentry work done by somebody who understood plumbing.

"There was no furniture in the room. It was thick with dust. On the wall was a picture hanging cockeyed. The door was open and we went on and found a landing and a narrow flight of stairs leading down. But the curious thing about those stairs was that they didn't stop on the ground floor. In fact, there was no door opening until we got to the basement. There had been a door on the ground floor, but it had been bricked up.

"We were going down the last flight of steps when we heard a door bang and the sound of a bolt being shot. When we got to the basement level we found a door. It was shut, and we couldn't move it. I could find nothing on the stairs in the light of my lamp

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

except evidence that somebody was in the habit of going up and down.

"When I went back up to the room with the balcony and examined the bars we had bent, I made rather an interesting discovery. Three of the screws on the lower left-hand corner had been taken out, and they had been taken out with a jagged top of a sardine tin. We found the 'opener' lying on the floor. It must have taken a long time to loosen those screws, for one of the screwholes was quite dark, and must have been exposed for months.

"There were two courses left to us: one was to come the next day with an official search warrant, which no magistrate would grant on the information we had; and the other was to go round and wake up Costino and ask him to let us go through the house. But there was a good reason for not doing that.

"I took off my shoes and went down the stairs in my stockinged feet, with my sergeant behind me. We crept up to the door and listened. For a little time I heard nothing, partly because the thunder was still turning the house into a drum, and partly because we could not quite tune in. But after a while I heard a man breathing very quickly, like somebody who had been running.

"We waited for a quarter of an hour and then another quarter of an hour. It seemed like a week. And then we heard the bolt being very gently pushed back. A man on the other side of the door opened it an inch. In another second I was through. He ran like the wind along the cellar and was just reaching another door when I grabbed him. He fought like six men, but we got him down.

"And then he said, 'Don't kill me, Charles. I'll give you half of the money.'

"And that was all I wanted to know.

"We pulled him up and sat him on an old box, and I explained that we were just innocent police officers, that we very seldom kill anybody except under the greatest provocation, and after a while we got Mr. Peter Costino calm, and he told us how his brother had come down to Eastbourne to see him and borrow some money, and how Charles got him drunk and intended driving him and the car over the cliff.

"Peter wouldn't have known this but his brother told him afterwards. Charles had lost heart and let the car go over by itself, then brought Peter back to Bidderley Hall, and shut him up in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cellar. Peter didn't know very much about it till he woke up the next morning and found himself a prisoner, and after two years of this kind of life he got more or less reconciled, especially as he was allowed to go up to the room with the balcony. It was the only bit of the world he was allowed to see, and then only at nights.

"That's the trouble with criminals—they never go the whole hog. Charles didn't have the nerve to kill his brother. He just locked him up. He got the house and half a million pounds, but he got about two million worries. Those two years made Peter a sober man and turned Charles into a drunkard. Peter might have eventually died in this cellar if Mr. Charles Costino hadn't given Simon a thousand quid to keep his mouth shut about the silver he had stolen and hidden in the house. Charles was in mortal terror that we would search the house for the missing silver, and if we had searched the house we'd have found Peter.

"Charles is in Dartmoor now. So is Simon. He got a lagging for a big smash-and-grab raid, and drew five years. From what I've heard, he and Charles are quite good friends. The last I heard of Charles he was painting angels in the prison chapel. As I say, he was always a bit artistic."

"Q"

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Connecticut 06830.

For change of address, please advise 4 to 6 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* crime story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

After living six years in a New York City apartment, Ginnie and Stan Brixton bought an isolated house in Connecticut. The first night in the new house Ginnie was alone, except for Cassie, their ginger-and-white cat. Ginnie was just drifting off to sleep when she heard something downstairs. "A thrust of fear went through her" . . .

As is true in all her stories, Patricia Highsmith gets under your skin, gets you involved. *What happened to Ginnie Brixton has happened statistically to relatively few people. But—it could happen to you!*

SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO LIVE WITH

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

"Don't forget to lock all the doors," Stan said. "Someone might think because the car's gone, nobody's home."

"All the doors? You mean two. You haven't asked me anything—esthetic, such as how the place looks now."

Stan laughed. "I suppose the pictures are all hung and the books are in the shelves."

"Well, not quite, but your shirts and sweaters—and the kitchen. It looks—I'm happy, Stan. So is Cassie. She's walking all around the place purring. See you tomorrow morning then. Around eleven, you said?"

"Around eleven. I'll bring stuff for lunch, don't worry."

"Love to your mom. I'm glad she's better."

"Thanks, darling." Stan hung up.

Cassie, their ginger-and-white cat aged four, sat looking at Ginnie as if she had never seen a telephone before. Purring again.

© *1976 by Patricia Highsmith.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dazed by all the unaccustomed space, Ginnie thought. Cassie began kneading the rug in an ecstasy of contentment, and Ginnie laughed.

Ginnie and Stan Brixton had bought a house in Connecticut after six years in a New York City apartment. Their furniture had been here for a week while they wound things up in New York, and yesterday had been the final move of smaller things like silverware, some dishes, a few pictures, suitcases, kitchen things, and the cat. Stan had taken their son Freddie this morning to spend the night in New Hope, Pennsylvania, where Stan's mother lived. His mother had had a second heart attack and was recuperating at home. "Every time I see her, I think it may be the last. You don't mind if I go, do you, Ginnie? It'll keep Freddie out of the way while you're fiddling around." Ginnie hadn't minded.

"Fiddling around" was Stan's term for organizing and even cleaning. Ginnie thought she had done a good job since Stan and Freddie had taken off this morning. The lovely French blue-and-white vase which reminded Ginnie of Monet's paintings stood on the living-room bookcase now, even bearing red roses from the garden. Ginnie had made headway in the kitchen, installing things the way she wanted them, the way they would remain. Cassie had her litter pan ("What a euphemism, litter ought to mean a bed," Stan said) in the downstairs john corner. They now had an upstairs bathroom too.

The house was on a hill with no other houses around it for nearly a mile—not that they owned all the land around, but the land around was farmland. When she and Stan had seen the place in June, sheep and goats had been grazing not far away. They had both fallen in love with the house.

Stanley Brixton was a novelist and fiction critic, and Ginnie wrote articles and was now half through her second novel. Her first had been published but had had only a modest success. You couldn't expect a smash hit with a first novel, Stan said, unless the publicity was extraordinary. Water under the bridge. Ginnie was more interested in her novel-in-progress. They had a mortgage on the house, and with her writing and Stan's free-lance work they thought they could be independent of New York, at least independent of nine-to-five jobs. Stan had already published three books—adventure stories with a political slant. He was 32 and for three years had been overseas correspondent for a newspaper syndicate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ginnie picked up a piece of heavy twine from the living-room rug, and suddenly realized that her back hurt a little from the day's exertions. She had thought of switching on the TV, but the news was just over, as she saw from her watch, and it might be better to go straight to bed and get up earlyish in the morning.

"Cassie?"

Cassie replied with a courteous, sustained, "M-wah-h?"

"Hungry?" Cassie knew the word. "No, you've had enough. Do you know you're getting middle-age spread? Come on. Going up to bed with me?"

Ginnie went to the front door, which was already locked by its automatic lock, but she put the chain on also. Yawning, she turned out the downstairs lights and climbed the stairs. Cassie followed her.

Ginnie had a quick bath, her second of the day, pulled on a nightgown, brushed her teeth, and got into bed. She at once realized she was too tired to pick up one of the English weeklies, political and Stan's favorites, which she had dropped by the bed to look at. She put out the lamp. *Home.* She and Stan had spent one night here last weekend during the big move. This was the first night she had been alone in the house which still had no name. *Something like White Elephant maybe,* Stan had said; *you think of something.* Ginnie tried to think, an activity which made her instantly sleepier . . .

She was awakened by a crunching sound, like that of car tires on gravel. She raised up a little in bed. Had she heard it? Their driveway hadn't any gravel to speak of, just unpaved earth. But—

Wasn't that a *click?* From somewhere. Front, back? Or had it been a twig falling on the roof?

She had locked the doors, hadn't she?

Ginnie suddenly remembered that she had not locked the back door. For another minute, as Ginnie listened, everything was silent. What a bore to go downstairs again! But she thought she had better do it, so she could honestly tell Stan she had. Ginnie found the lamp switch and got out of bed.

By now she was thinking that any noise she had heard had been imaginary, something out of a dream. But Cassie followed her in a brisk, anxious way, Ginnie noticed.

The glow from the staircase light enabled Ginnie to find her way to the kitchen, where she switched on the strong ceiling light. She went at once to the back door and turned the Yale bolt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then she listened. All was silent. The big kitchen looked exactly the same with its half-modern, half-old-fashioned furnishings—electric stove, big white wooden cupboard with drawers below, shelves above, double sink, a huge new refrigerator.

Ginnie went back upstairs, Cassie still following. Cassie was short for Cassandra, a name Stan had given her when she had been a kitten, because she had looked gloomy, unshakably pessimistic. Ginnie was drifting off to sleep again when she heard a bump downstairs, as if someone had staggered slightly. She switched on the bedside lamp again, and a thrust of fear went through her when she saw Cassie rigidly crouched on the bed with her eyes fixed on the open bedroom door.

Now there was another bump from downstairs, and the unmistakable rustle of a drawer being slid out, and it could be only the dining-room drawer where the silver was.

She had locked someone *in* with her!

Her first thought was to reach for the telephone and get the police, but the telephone was downstairs in the living room.

Go down and face it and threaten him with something—or them, she told herself. Maybe it was an adolescent kid, just a local kid who'd be glad to get off unreported, if she scared him a little. Ginnie jumped out of bed, put on Stan's bathrobe, a sturdy blue flannel thing, and tied the belt firmly. She descended the stairs. By now she heard more noises.

"Who's *there?*" she shouted boldly.

"Hum-hum. Just me, lady," said a rather deep voice.

The living-room lights and the dining-room lights were full on.

In the dining room Ginnie was confronted by a stocking-hooded figure in what she thought of as motorcycle gear: black trousers, black boots, black plastic jacket. The stocking had slits cut in it for the eyes. And the figure carried a dirty canvas bag like a railway mailbag, and plainly into this the silverware had already gone, because the dining-room drawer gaped, empty. He must have been hiding in a corner of the dining room, Ginnie thought, when she had come down to lock the back door. The hooded figure shoved the drawer to carelessly, and it didn't quite close.

"Keep your mouth shut, and you won't get hurt. All right?" The voice sounded like that of a man of at least 25.

Ginnie didn't see any gun or knife. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing?" And the man got on with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his business. The two candlesticks from the dining-room table went into the bag. So did the silver table lighter.

Was there anyone else with him? Ginnie glanced toward the kitchen, but didn't see anyone, and no sound came from there. "I'm going to call the police," she said, and started for the living-room telephone.

"Phone's cut, lady. You better keep quiet, because no one can hear you around here even if you scream."

Was that true? Unfortunately it was true. Ginnie for a few seconds concentrated on memorizing the man's appearance: *about five feet eight, medium build, maybe a bit slender, broad* hands—but since the hands were in blue rubber gloves, were they broad?—rather big feet. Blond or brunette she couldn't tell, because of the stocking mask. Robbers like this usually bound and gagged people. Ginnie wanted to avoid that, if she could.

"If you're looking for money, there's not much in the house just now," Ginnie said, "except what's in my handbag upstairs, about thirty dollars. Go ahead and take it."

"I'll get around to it," he said laughing, prowling the living room now. He took the letter opener from the coffee table, then Freddie's photograph from the piano, because the photograph was in a silver frame.

Ginnie thought of banging him on the head with—with what? She saw nothing heavy enough, portable, except one of the dining-room chairs. And if she failed to knock him out with the first swat? Was the telephone really cut? She moved toward the telephone in the corner.

"Don't go near the door. Stay in sight!"

"Ma-wow-wow-*wow*!" This from Cassie, a high-pitched wail that to Ginnie meant Cassie was on the brink of throwing up, except that now the situation was different. Cassie looked ready to attack the man.

"Go back, Cassie, take it easy," Ginnie said.

"I don't like cats," the hooded man said over his shoulder.

There was not much else he could take from the living room, Ginnie thought. The pictures on the walls were too big. And what burglar was interested in pictures, at least pictures like these which were a few oils done by their painter friends, two or three water colors— Was this really happening? Was a stranger picking up her mother's old sewing basket, looking inside, banging it down again? Taking the French vase, tossing the water and roses

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toward the fireplace? The vase went into the sack.

"What's upstairs?" The ugly head turned toward her. "Let's go upstairs."

"There's *nothing* upstairs!" Ginnie shouted. She darted toward the telephone, knowing it would be cut, but wanting to see it with her own eyes that it was cut. She saw the abruptly stopped wire on the floor, cut some four feet from the telephone.

The hood chuckled. "Told you."

A red flashlight stuck out of the back pocket of his trousers. He was going into the hall now, ready to climb the stairs. The staircase light was on, but he pulled the flashlight from his pocket.

"Nothing *up* there, I tell you!" Ginnie found herself following him like a ninny, holding up the hem of Stan's dressing gown so she wouldn't trip on the stairs.

"Cozy little nook," said the hood, entering the bedroom. "And what have we here? Anything of interest?"

The silver-backed brush and comb on the dresser were of interest, also the hand mirror, and these went into the bag, which was now dragging on the floor.

"Aha! I like that thing!" He had spotted the heavy wooden box with brass corners which Stan used for his cuff links and handkerchiefs and a few white ties, but its size was apparently daunting the man in the hood because he swayed in front of it and said, "Be back for that." He looked around for lighter and smaller objects, and in went Ginnie's black leather jewelry box, her Dunhill lighter from the bedside table. "Ought to be glad I'm not attacking you. Haven't the time." The tone was jocular.

My God, Ginnie thought, you'd think Stan and I were rich! She had never considered herself and Stan rich, or that they had anything worth invading a house for. No doubt in New York they'd been lucky for six years—no robberies at all—because even a typewriter was valuable to a drug addict. No, they weren't rich, but he was taking all they had, all the *nice* things they'd accumulated over the years. Ginnie watched him open her handbag, lift the dollar bills from her billfold. That was the least of it.

"If you think for one minute you're going to get away with this," Ginnie said. "In a small community like *this?* You haven't a prayer. If you don't leave those things here tonight, I'll report you so quick—"

"Oh, shut up, lady. Where's the other rooms here?"

Cassie snarled. She had followed them both up the stairs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A black boot struck out sideways and caught the cat sharply in the ribs.

"Don't touch that cat!" Ginnie cried out.

Ginnie sprang growling onto the man's boot top, at his knee.

Ginnie was astounded—and proud of Cassie—for a second.

With a gloved hand the intruder caught the cat by the loose skin on her back and flung her against a wall with a backhand swing. The cat dropped, panting, and the man stomped on her side and kicked her in the head.

"You *damn*—" Ginnie screamed.

"So much for your stinking—yowlers!" said the beige hood, and kicked the cat once again. His voice had been husky with rage, and now he stalked with his flashlight into the hall, in quest of other rooms.

Dazed, stiff, Ginnie followed him.

The guestroom had only a chest of drawers in it, empty, but the man slid out a couple of drawers to have a look. Freddie's room had nothing but a bed and table. The man wasted no time there.

From the hall Ginnie looked into the bedroom at her cat. The cat twitched and was still. One foot had twitched. Ginnie stood rigid as a column of stone. She had just seen Cassie die, she realized.

"Back in a flash," said the hooded man, briskly descending the stairs with his sack which was now so heavy he had to carry it on one shoulder.

Ginnie moved at last, in jerks, like someone awakening from an anesthetic. Her body and mind seemd not to be connected. Her hand reached for the stair rail and missed it. She was no longer afraid at all, though she did not consciously know this. She simply kept following the hooded figure, her enemy, and would have kept on, even if he had pointed a gun at her.

By the time she reached the kitchen, he was out of sight. The kitchen door was open, and a cool breeze blew in. Ginnie continued across the kitchen, looked left into the driveway, and saw a flashlight's beam swing as the man heaved a bag into a car. She heard the hum of two male voices. So he had a pal waiting for him!

And here he came back.

With sudden swiftness Ginnie picked up a kitchen stool which had a square formica top and chromium legs. As soon as the hooded figure stepped onto the threshold of the kitchen, Ginnie

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swung the stool and hit him full in the forehead with the edge of the stool's seat.

Momentum carried the man forward, but he stooped, staggering, and Ginnie cracked him again on the top of the head with all her strength. She held two legs of the stool in her hands. He fell with a great thump and clatter onto the linoleum floor. Another whack for good measure on the back of his stockinged head. She felt pleased and relieved to see blood coming through the beige material.

"Frankie? —You okay? —*Frankie*!"

The voice came from the car outside.

Poised now, not at all afraid, Ginnie stood braced for the next arrival. She held a leg of the stool in her right hand, and her left supported the seat. She waited, barely two feet from the open door, for the sound of boots in the driveway, for another figure in the doorway.

Instead she heard a car motor start, then saw a glow of its lights through the door. The car was backing down the drive.

Finally Ginnie set the stool down. The house was silent again. The man on the floor was not moving. Was he dead?

I don't care. I simply don't give a damn, Ginnie said inside herself.

But she did care. What if he woke up? What if he needed a doctor or a hospital right away? And there was no telephone. The nearest house was nearly a mile away, the village more than a mile. Ginnie would have to walk it with a flashlight. Of course if she encountered a car, a car might stop and then she could tell someone to fetch a doctor or an ambulance. These thoughts went through Ginnie's head in seconds, and then she returned to the facts. The fact was, he *might* be dead. Killed by her.

So was Cassie dead. Ginnie turned toward the living room. Cassie's death was more real, more important than the body at her feet which only might be dead. Ginnie drew a glass of water for herself at the kitchen sink.

Everything was silent outside. Now Ginnie was calm enough to realize that the robber's chum had thought it best to make a getaway. He probably wasn't coming back, not even with reinforcements. After all, he had the loot in his car—silverware, her jewelry box, all the nice things.

Ginnie stared at the long black figure on her kitchen floor. He hadn't moved at all. The right hand lay under him, the left arm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was outstretched. The stockinged head was turned slightly toward her, one slit showing. She couldn't see what was going on behind that crazy slit.

"Are you *awake*?" Ginnie said, rather loudly.

She waited.

She knew she would have to face it. Best to feel the pulse in the wrist, she thought, and at once forced herself to do this. She pulled the rubber gloves down a bit and gripped a blondish-haired wrist which seemed to her of astonishing breadth, much wider than Stan's wrist, at any rate. She couldn't feel any pulse. She altered the place where she had put her thumb, and tried again. There was no pulse.

So she had murdered someone. But the fact did not sink in.

Two thoughts danced in her mind: she would have to remove Cassie, put a towel or something around her; and she was not going to be able to sleep or even remain in this house with a corpse lying on the kitchen floor.

Ginnie got a dishtowel, a folded clean one from a stack on a shelf, took a second one, went to the hall and climbed the stairs. Cassie was now bleeding. Rather, she had bled. The blood on the carpet looked dark. One of Cassie's eyes projected from the socket. Ginnie gathered her as gently as if she were still alive and only injured, and enfolded her in a towel, opened the second towel and put that around her too. Then she carried Cassie down to the living room, hesitated, then laid the cat's body to one side of the fireplace on the floor. By accident a red rose lay beside Cassie.

Tackle the blood now, she told herself. She got a plastic bowl from the kitchen, drew some cold water, and took a sponge. Upstairs, she went to work on hands and knees, changing the water in the bathroom. The task was soothing.

Next job: clothes on and find the nearest telephone. Ginnie kept moving, barely aware of what she was doing, and suddenly she was standing in the kitchen in blue jeans, sneakers, sweater, and jacket with her billfold in a pocket. Empty billfold, she remembered. She had her house keys in her left hand. For no good reason she decided to leave the kitchen light on. The front door was still locked. She found she had the flashlight in a jacket pocket too and supposed she had taken it from the table in the front hall when she came down the stairs.

She went on, locked the kitchen door from the outside with a key, and made her way to the road.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No moon at all. She walked with the aid of the flashlight along the left side of the road toward the village, focused the light once on her watch and saw that it was 1:20. By starlight, by a bit of flashlight, she saw one house far to the left in a field, but so dark and so far away that Ginnie thought she might do better to keep on.

She kept on. Dark road. Trudging. Did *everybody* go to bed early around here?

In the distance she saw two or three white streetlights and the lights of the village. Surely there'd be a car before she reached the village.

There wasn't a car. Ginnie was still trudging as she entered the village proper, whose boundary was marked by neat white signs on both sides of the road saying: EAST KINDALE.

My God, Ginnie thought. *Is this true? Is this what I'm doing?*

Not a light showed in any of the neat, mostly white houses. There was not even a light at the Connecticut Yankee Inn, the only functioning hostelry and bar in town, Stan had remarked once. Nevertheless, Ginnie marched up the steps and knocked on the door. Then with her flashlight she saw a brass knocker on the white door and availed herself of that.

Rap-rap-rap!

Minutes passed. *Be patient,* Ginnie told herself. *You're overwrought.*

But she felt compelled to rap again.

"Who's there?" a man's voice called.

"A neighbor! There's been an accident!"

Ginnie fairly collapsed against the figure who opened the door. It was a man in a plaid woolen bathrobe and pajamas. In a few minutes she was sitting on a straight chair in a sort of living room and had blurted out the story.

"We'll—we'll get the police right away, ma'am. Or an ambulance. But from what you say—"

The man was in his sixties. His wife, more efficient-looking, had joined him to listen. She wore a dressing gown and pink slippers. "Police, Jake. Man sounds dead from what the lady says. Even if he isn't, the police'll know what to do."

"Hello! Ethel! That you?" the man said into the telephone. "Listen, we need the police right away. You know the old Hardwick place? Tell 'em to go there . . . No, *not* on fire. Can't explain now. But somebody'll be there to open the door in about five minutes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The woman pushed a glass of something into Ginnie's hand. Ginnie realized that her teeth were chattering. She was cold, though it wasn't cold outside. It was early September, she remembered.

"They're going to want to speak with you." The man who had been in the plaid robe was now in trousers and a belted sports jacket. "You'll have to tell them the time it happened and all that."

Ginnie thanked the woman and went with the man to his car. It was an ordinary four-door, and Ginnie noticed a discarded Cracker Jack box on the floor of the passenger's seat as she got in.

A police car was already in her driveway. Someone was knocking on the back door, and Ginnie saw that she'd left the kitchen light on.

"Hya, Jake! What's up?" called a second policeman, getting out of the black car in the driveway.

"Lady had a house robbery," the man with Ginnie explained. "She thinks—well, you've got the keys, haven't you, Mrs. Brixton?"

"Oh, yes, yes." Ginnie fumbled for them. She was gasping again, and reminded herself that it was a time to keep calm, to answer questions accurately. She opened the kitchen door.

A policeman stooped beside the prone figure. "Dead," he said.

"The—Mrs. Brixton said she hit him with the kitchen stool. That one, ma'am?" The man called Jake pointed to the yellow formica stool.

"Yes. He was coming *back,* you see. You see—" Ginnie choked and gave up, for the moment.

Jake cleared his throat and said, "Mrs. Brixton and her husband just moved in. Husband isn't here tonight. She'd left the kitchen door unlocked and two—well, one fellow came in, this one. He went out with a bag of stuff he'd taken, put it in a waiting car, then came back to get more, and that's when Mrs. Brixton hit him."

"Um-*hum*," said the policeman, still stooped on his heels. "Can't touch the body till the detective gets here. Can I use your phone, Mrs. Brixton?"

"They cut the phone," Jake said. "That's why she had to walk to my place."

The other policeman went out to telephone from his car. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

policeman who remained put on water for coffee (or had he said tea?), and chatted with Jake about tourists, about someone they both knew who had just got married—as if they had known each other for years. Ginnie was sitting on one of the dining-room chairs. The policeman asked where the instant coffee was, if she had any, and Ginnie got up to show him the coffee jar which she had put on a cabinet shelf beside the stove.

"Terrible introduction to a new house," the policeman remarked, holding his steaming cup. "But we all sure hope—" Suddenly his words seemed to dry up. His eyes flickered and looked away from Ginnie's face.

A couple of men in plainsclothes arrived. Photographs were taken of the dead man. Ginnie went over the house with one of the men, who made notes of the items Ginnie said were stolen. No, she hadn't seen the color of the car, much less the license plate. The body on the floor was wrapped and carried out on a stretcher. Ginnie had only a glimpse of that, from which the detective tried to shield her. Ginnie was in the dining room then, reckoning up the silver.

"I didn't mean to kill him!" Ginnie cried out suddenly, interrupting the detective. "Not *kill* him, honestly!"

Stan arrived very early, about 8:00 A.M., with Freddie, and went to the Inn to fetch Ginnie. Ginnie had spent the night there, and someone had telephoned Stan at the number Ginnie had given.

"She's had a shock," Jake said to Stan.

Stan looked bewildered. But at least he had heard what happened, and Ginnie didn't have to go over it.

"All the nice things we had," Ginnie said. "And the cat—"

"The police might get our stuff back, Ginnie. If not, we'll buy more. We're all safe, at least." Stan set his firm jaw, but he smiled. He glanced at Freddie who stood in the doorway, looking a little pale from lack of sleep. "Come on. We're going home."

He took Ginnie's hand. His hand felt warm, and she realized her own hands were cold again.

They tried to keep the identity of the dead man from her, Ginnie knew, but on the second day she happened to see it printed—on a folded newspaper which lay on the counter in the grocery store. There was a photograph of him too, a blondish fellow with curly hair and a rather defiant expression. *Frank Collins, 24, of Hartford.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stan felt that they ought to go on living in the house, gradually buy the "nice things" again that Ginnie kept talking about. Stan said she ought to get back to work on her novel.

"I don't want any nice things any more. Not again." That was true, but that was only part of it. The worst was that she had killed someone, stopped a life. She couldn't fully appreciate it, therefore couldn't believe it somehow, or understand it.

"At least we could get another cat."

"Not yet," she said.

People said to her (like Mrs. Gladys Durham, who lived a mile or so out of East Kindale on the opposite side from the Brixtons), "You mustn't reproach yourself. You did it in defense of your house. Don't you think a lot of us wish we had the courage, if someone comes barging in intending to rob you . . ."

"I wouldn't hesitate—to do what you did!" That was from perky Peggy Hamilton, a young married woman with black curly hair, active in local politics, who lived in East Kindale proper. She came especially to call on Ginnie and to make her acquaintance and Stan's. "These hoodlums from miles away—Hartford!—they come to rob us, just because they think we still have some family silver and a few *nice* things . . ."

There was the phrase again, *nice things*.

Stan came home one day with a pair of silver candlesticks for the dining-room table. "Less than a hundred dollars, and we can afford them," Stan said.

To Ginnie they looked like bait for another robbery. They were pretty, yes. Georgian. Modern copy, but still beautiful. But she could not take any esthetic pleasure from them.

"Did you take a swat at your book this afternoon?" Stan asked cheerfully. He had been out of the house nearly three hours that afternoon and had made sure the doors were locked, for Ginnie's sake, before he left. He had also bought a metal wheelbarrow for use in the garden, and it was still strapped to the roof of the car.

"No," Ginnie said. "But I suppose I'm making progress. I have to get back to a state of concentration, you know."

"Of course I know," Stan said. "I'm a writer too."

The police never recovered the silverware, or Ginnie's leather box which had held her engagement ring (it had become too small and she hadn't got around to having it enlarged), and her grandmother's gold necklace and so forth. Stan told Ginnie they had checked out all the acquaintances of the man who had invaded

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the house, but hadn't come up with anything. The police thought the dead man might have struck up acquaintance with his chum very recently, possibly the same night as the robbery.

"Darling," Stan said, "do you think we should *move* from this house? I'm willing—if it'd make you feel—less—"

Ginnie shook her head. It wasn't the house. She didn't any longer (after two months) even think of the corpse on the floor when she went into the kitchen. It was something inside her. "No," Ginnie said.

"Well—I think you ought to talk to a psychiatrist. Just one visit even," Stan added, interrupting a protest from Ginnie. "It isn't enough for neighbors to say you did the natural thing. Maybe you need a professional to tell you." Stan chuckled. He was in tennis shoes and old clothes, and had had a good day at the typewriter.

Ginnie agreed, to please Stan.

The psychiatrist was in Hartford, a man recommended by a local medical doctor. Stan drove Ginnie there, and waited for her in the car. It was to be an hour's session, but Ginnie reappeared after about forty minutes.

"He gave me some pills to take," Ginnie said.

"Is *that* all? —But what did he say?"

"Oh." Ginnie shrugged. "The same as they all say, that—nobody blames me, the police didn't make a fuss, so what—" She shrugged again, glanced at Stan and saw the terrible disappointment in his face as he looked from her into the distance through the windshield.

Ginnie knew he was thinking again about "guilt" and abandoning it, abandoning the word again. She had said no, she didn't feel guilty, that wasn't the trouble, that would have been too simple. She felt disturbed, she had said many times, and she couldn't do anything about it.

"You really ought to write a book about it, a novel," Stan said—this for at least the fourth time.

"And how can I, if I can't come to terms with it myself, if I can't even analyze it first?" This Ginnie said for at least the third time and possibly the fourth. It was as if she had an unsolvable mystery within her. "You can't write a book just stammering around on paper."

Stan then started the car.

The pills were mild sedatives combined with some kind of mild picker-uppers. They didn't make much change in Ginnie, if any.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two more months passed. Ginnie resisted buying any "nice things," so they had nothing but the nice candlesticks. They ate with stainless steel. Freddie pulled out of his period of tension and suppressed excitement (he knew quite well what had happened in the kitchen), and to Ginnie's eyes became quite normal again, whatever normal was. Ginnie got back to work on the book she had started before moving into the house. She didn't ever dream about the murder, or manslaughter—in fact, she often thought it might be better if she did dream about it.

But among people—and it was a surprisingly friendly region, they had all the social life they could wish—she felt compelled to say sometimes, when there was a lull in the conversation:

"Did you know, by the way, I once killed a man?"

Everyone would look at her, except of course those who had heard her say this before, maybe three times before.

Stan would grow tense and blank-minded, having failed once more to spring in before Ginnie got launched. He was jittery at social gatherings, trying like a fencer to dart in with something, anything to say, before Ginnie made her big thrust. It's just something they, he and Ginnie, had to live with, Stan told himself.

And it probably would go on and on, even maybe when Freddie was 12 and even 20. It had, in fact, half ruined their marriage. But it was emphatically not worth divorcing her. He still loved Ginnie. She was still Ginnie after all. She was just somehow different. Even Ginnie had said that about herself.

"It's something I just have to live with," Stan murmured to himself.

"What?" It was Peggy Hamilton on his left, asking him what he had said. "Oh, I know, I know." She smiled understandingly. "But maybe it does her good."

Ginnie was in the middle of her story. At least she always made it short, and even managed to laugh in a couple of places.

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 446th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . "in which," to quote a member of our editorial staff, "a too clever criminal lawyer gets his comeuppance" . . .

The author, Jack P. Nelson, sold one story in 1965, to an obscure magazine, and there is no positive evidence that the story was ever published. So "The Weasel" is virtually Mr. Nelson's first story, and definitely his first mystery, and a powerful, gripping first story it is . . . Mr. Nelson is in his early forties and a teacher of English at a private boys' school in Chicago. For a long time he has been writing for his "personal pleasure." But a few years ago he "realized that in order to teach composition well," he had to discipline himself as a writer and approach his pleasant hobby as a craft. "'I also found," he told us, "that I enjoyed the challenge of 'sweating it out' over my typewriter."

His hobbies include reading, listening to music, painting, the theater, travel, and the archeology of Mexico. We think that with Mr. Nelson's background and his attitude to professional writing, we will be hearing more, much more, from this talented new writer . . .

THE WEASEL

by JACK P. NELSON

"Will you be late?" Karen bent over the rosebush, the sun glinting in her loose red hair, her hands white against the dark green leaves and pale stalks. She did not look up at him as she spoke.

Michael paused, his hand on the cool smoothness of the car door. A miniature of the colonial house, the smooth lawn, the rose garden, and his wife was reflected in the sleek black of the auto-

© 1976 by Jack P. Nelson.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mobile. He stared at the reflection as he spoke, choosing his words carefully.

"No. I'll be back before two. We can take Mary down to the lake for a while. It's going to be a hot day. You going out?"

He turned to see her shake her head. Her voice was low, almost a whisper, and there was a question in the normality of her answer. "No, I'll be here all day."

Her tone questioned him and he could not answer. He had tried to answer during the long hours of the night, but she still asked. Asked without words. Asked why an animal like Mort Janson would go free this morning because of her husband.

To Michael, the answer had been simple. Janson's freedom meant Michael's reputation. Through the long hot summer days his brilliance and wit had dazzled a courtroom of spectators, provided copy for wilting reporters jammed in the corridors, dashed the plodding competence of the District Attorney, and pushed a jury to the verge of freeing a man who was a murderer.

No, thought Michael as he slid into the car, he couldn't answer. Janson was an animal, a vicious beast. He was worse than a murderer and he was guilty. Michael had known it from the first day he had taken the case. Morton Janson had broken into the home of Daniel Frye last October, almost a year ago. He had pushed past Emily Frye on that hot autumn afternoon, had assaulted her, dragged her into the kitchen, and cut her throat. Then he had stopped for a quarter of an hour while he poured and drank a cup of coffee, sitting in the kitchen near the body he had butchered.

Walking back into the front hall, Janson had seen the Fryes' four-year-old son, wakened from his nap, standing on the staircase. Janson killed the child, brutally, then walked from the house, leaving the front door open and the bloody knife on a table on the sun porch.

Now, after a short morning in court, Janson would go free.

Michael turned on the ignition and waved as Karen looked up at him. He would never be able to explain the "why" to her. Why it didn't matter whether the man was guilty or not, why it mattered only that Michael Berry had won another spectacular case.

As the car moved smoothly down the tree-shaded street, silent except for the soft hum of the air conditioner, Michael relaxed. She would forget. After a few hours at the lake they would drive back and put Mary to bed, then have a late dinner on the patio.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He would keep the evening paper from her for a few days, and Karen would forget. She would forget about the Frye murders, forget Mort Janson. Before long she would remember only that her husband had won again. It had happened before. He smiled as he headed the car onto the expressway and into the heavy morning traffic.

"Congratulations!" Michael accepted his receptionist's greeting with a smile and a short nod. The morning in court had gone faster than he had anticipated, but he was still running late. The reporters crowding around him, the flashes from their cameras, the questions as he slowly made his way from the courtroom to the elevators, then down the steps of the courthouse to the parking lot and his car—he had taken it all at a leisurely pace, enjoying it, basking in the words, sensing the amazement, barely catching the cutting edge of censure in the questions that crowded down on him, overlapping and interrupting each other until he had laughed with pleasure. And the cameras had caught his laugh. Head thrown back, dark hair curling over his forehead, the brilliant flash of white teeth. It would make a good news picture.

He had seen Morton Janson only once, briefly, as the courtroom cleared. The thin weasel-like man had been watching him, his beady eyes shifting from side to side, his muddy brown hair slicked down, a crooked smile on his face. He was slumped in his chair like some noxious vermin.

Michael had turned away. He needed no thanks from Janson who was merely publicity, another brick in his career. But Janson was also an animal.

Smiling, he accepted his secretary's congratulations and proceeded to sort the papers on his desk. It was nearly one P.M. when he pushed the intercom button and called Joyce into his office.

"Joyce, what's this note from Hal Speicht?"

Joyce Crowne, perfect legal secretary, flushed in confusion.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Berry, I should have mentioned it right away. I was so excited about the Janson verdict. Mr. Speicht called just before you came in. He said he had to see you and that it was very important." She indicated the note. "He said he would meet you at the Casa del Lago at one thirty."

Michael frowned. "Get him on the phone. I haven't time—did he say what he wanted?"

Joyce flushed again. "No, just that it was very important. I'm sorry, Mr. Berry, but he said he couldn't be reached this aft-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ernoon. Do you want me to call the restaurant—?"

"No." Annoyed, he pushed his chair back from the desk. Hal Speicht was an old friend, an important friend. At one time they had talked about going into partnership, but Michael had decided he prefered criminal instead of corporate law. If Hal said it was important—

"No, I'll meet him. Just call my wife and tell her I'll be home about an hour late. Tell her to have Mary ready by three and we'll stop to eat dinner on the way home from the beach."

If he hurried, he would just make it to the Casa del Lago by 1:30. Whatever Hal wanted could be cleared up in an hour, then 45 minutes if traffic was light, and he would be home by 3:15 or 3:30.

He pushed papers into his briefcase and left the cool wood-paneled office for the blazing pavements of the August afternoon. The Casa del Lago was just a few blocks from the office, but pushing through the sweating, steamy crowds on the street made it seem like miles.

Inside the dark, almost cold interior of the restaurant with its heavy wood tables, deep red-silk walls, and shaded lamps, he could relax again. The waiter showed him to an empty table in a quiet corner of the main dining room. Hal was late. Michael ordered a martini and looked around the room.

Most of the noon crowd had left and few tables were occupied. The bar was empty except for one man at the far corner, half hidden in the shadows.

The martini came and Michael enjoyed the icy burning of the gin going down his throat. He glanced at his watch. 1:45. Idly he stared at the door, expecting Hal to arrive as the outside door opened, flashing sunlight into the dining area. Two young women stepped down from the foyer. He finished the martini. The door flashed sunlight again. A man and a woman, both elderly, came in. He looked at his watch again. Two o'clock.

One more martini and fifteen more minutes, he thought. Then I'll leave Hal a message and head for home. Michael looked up to signal the waiter. The man from the bar was moving across the room toward his table. Now that his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness of the dining room, Michael realized that he knew the man. He had seen him someplace. Where?

The man was coming directly to him, moving slowly, threading his way through the tables and chairs. Where had Michael seen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him before? It was recently. The courtroom! With a shiver of recognition he knew the man. He had seen the face often. The thin face, the dark shadowed eyes, the shock of unruly blond hair. The man now standing across the table from him was Daniel Frye.

"May I sit down a minute, Mr. Berry?" Frye's voice was low, controlled.

"I. . ." Michael hesitated. "I'm sorry, Mr. Frye, but I'm waiting for a friend. I don't think we have anything to talk about." His forehead felt suddenly damp. Frye pulled out a chair and sat down, his eyes on Michael's face.

"Wait a minute!" Michael half rose from his chair. "I said—"

"Don't worry, Mr. Berry." Frye smiled—a thin, humorless smile. He placed his hands flat on the white tablecloth, pushing the silverware away as he stretched out his fingers. "I haven't a gun or anything." He smiled again. "You can come around and search me if you wish."

"Nonsense." Michael found he had to fight to breathe normally. There was a tight feeling in his chest and his eyes caught the gleam of light from the butter knife as Frye's fingers pushed it over the tablecloth.

"No, really, if you feel uneasy, I wish you would search me." Frye's brows knit. He leaned forward and a lock of hair fell over his pale forehead. "I haven't come to kill you, if that's what you're afraid of, Mr. Berry."

"I am not afraid." Michael spoke firmly, meeting Frye's eyes. Michael's stare was cold, penetrating, but Frye did not look away. "And I have no wish to search you, Mr. Frye. I just want you to go away. I don't want to be forced to call the waiter, but I want you to leave."

Frye broke. His look wavered, then dropped to his hands, still spread out, palm down, on the white linen. Michael felt a sudden thrill of triumph, a feeling of victory. It had worked again. The stare. The long look from his eyes, which Karen had described as being like Lake Superior water, cold and blue, had broken jurors and witnesses often, until the truth they thought and spoke became stammered lies.

Meeting Frye could have been unpleasant; there could have been a scene, but now Michael knew he was in control. He knew Frye had no gun, would not pick up the knife, would do nothing but sit there, staring at his hands. I could make him break down and leave him here at the table sobbing, thought Michael. If I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wanted to, I could break him. A sudden anger warmed him.

"I want to talk to you." Frye spoke without looking up. "Just for a few moments. I want to ask you something."

"I'm expecting a friend, Frye. You and I have nothing to talk about."

"You mean you're expecting Hal Speicht? He isn't coming. It was I who called your office. I used his name." Frye spoke slowly, deliberately, as though he were explaining things to a child.

"You? You arranged this?" Again the chill of fear.

"Yes. I had to ask you why." Frye looked up.

"Why?" It was Karen's question again. Always why.

"He should not have gone free. You knew it. You knew what he was. Yet you made it possible for him to go free. I don't understand why. And I have to know why, Mr. Berry. I waited for months, then I sat through the trial and watched you twist and turn things until he went free. Why did you do it?"

"Mr. Frye, I'm a lawyer. Morton Janson was my client. It was my duty."

"Duty!" A touch of anger, a hint of bitterness in the voice, then it was soft again. "You knew what you were doing. He wasn't fit to walk out free. Janson is a beast. Everyone knows what he is, what he has done. And then, at the end, he smiled. Smiled because he had killed and got away with it. The jury was all against him. They would have put him away, but you—you let him go out into the world again. You sent an animal out into the world. *Why,* Mr. Berry?"

"Mr. Frye, I sympathize with you. I know what you have been through." Michael had to end this. He had to get up and leave. The *why* again. He couldn't make Karen understand. He couldn't even try to explain to Frye. "You have to understand—"

"I came home early that afternoon. At least, I thought I had come home early. I wish I had never left the house that day. I remember the afternoon sun on the sidewalk, the chipped paint on the steps, then the door, standing open. I knew something was wrong before I even saw the knife. I think we have a feeling—something that screams out inside of us. Cavemen had that feeling when they came to the place where a wild beast had been. I sensed the beast. I saw the knife. Then I went inside, and—and I found them."

His voice trailed off. He leaned toward Michael. "Do you know what a weasel is like, Mr. Berry?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Weasel. Janson had reminded him of a weasel. Funny that Frye should use the same word.

"A weasel sneaks into nests, into places where other animals keep their young, and he kills. The life of a weasel is to kill, and the stench of a weasel is the stench of death."

He's mad, Michael thought. The man has gone mad. He looked up and tried to signal a waiter, but there was only one in the dining room now, and he had his back to their table, bending over to listen to the elderly couple. Why didn't he turn and look at Michael?

"You could have stopped him, Mr. Berry. The cage was shut and locked. Then you began to shake the bars and brag you could open the cage. I listened to you and heard it in your voice. You wanted to open the cage because no one else could. You knew Janson. He belonged in the cage, but you let him out."

Michael shivered. He wanted to slide from the chair, walk from the room, but he couldn't. Suddenly he felt the uncomfortable trickle of sweat down his back, soaking the shirt under his jacket. His mouth was dry, and he reached for the water glass.

"There was nothing I could do," Frye continued. "I wanted to get up and shout, to scream, to let the people know the evil they were doing. But I couldn't. Janson was guilty. His fingerprints—my wife would never have asked him in for coffee—he lied. You made them believe his lies. You wanted him to go free so that you could show everyone that you could do the impossible. Is that what you wanted to do? Or did you think that Janson was innocent?"

Michael looked at Frye over the top of the water glass. He willed his hand to be steady as he set the glass down. "Yes." He spoke clearly, calmly. "I believe Morton Janson was innocent. He did not kill your wife and your child."

Frye nodded, then turned and signaled to the waiter.

"Waiter, we need a telephone here. Can you . . .?"

"Certainly, sir." The waiter hurried across the room. The two men stared at each other over the table. Frye lifted his fingers from the table and lightly rested his hands on his knees. Michael leaned back in his chair, his fingers playing with the stem of the glass.

The waiter returned with a telephone, plugged it in, and placed it in front of Frye who waited until the waiter had left, then pushed the telephone toward Michael.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If you believe he was innocent, don't call."

"Don't call? Don't call who?"

"Don't call your home. He's there." Frye pushed the telephone until it touched Michael's hand. Michael recoiled as if it were a live thing.

"At my home?" It was barely a whisper.

Frye nodded. "I bribed someone in the courtoom. They gave him a note."

"A note? What note?" Despite his efforts, Michael's voice rose.

"I asked Janson to come to your home this afternoon. For a drink. To celebrate your victory and his freedom. I signed your name. He's been there for over an hour now. Is your wife beautiful, Mr. Berry? Mine was."

Michael swallowed as his hand moved toward the telephone. He hesitated. "You're joking."

"Oh, no. It's no joke." Frye smiled briefly. "I checked on you yesterday. I got your address, the name of your friend, Mr. Speicht. I had to do something, in case—but if Janson is innocent, you have nothing to worry about. You said he was innocent, Mr. Berry."

Karen . . . Michael thought of her deep red hair, her soft white skin, her tall sensual figure dressed in a bathing suit and a beach robe, waiting for him. He thought of Mary collecting her pail, shovel, and plastic animals for the beach. The white house, the cool green lawn, the red roses on their slender stalks.

Michael's fingers snapped the stem of the water glass. The crystal shattered on the table and the blood from his cut palm stained the white of the tablecloth.

Frye nodded. "Do you know that a weasel enjoys killing, Mr. Berry?"

Michael snatched the receiver and began to dial, his wound bleeding onto the telephone. He watched the blood run down the surface to the table as he listened to the first rings of the telephone.

"You have nothing to worry about if he is an innocent man. And you said he was innocent, Mr. Berry."

The telephone rang again and again. Michael looked up to see Frye smiling at him, a smile of pity, of sympathy, and the prolonged ringing of the telephone screamed in Michael's brain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* kind of detective by

DUFFY CARPENTER

Introducing a new character and a new author's name . . . and a new kind of detective—you wouldn't think a new kind of detective is possible after 135 years of creating nearly every kind of fictional sleuth imaginable! But Duffy Carpenter has come up with a detective-type previously unknown to your Editor—a Small Claims Court referee who acts like a judge, then doubles as a detective . . . We will be hearing more about Jeff Corbett and his cases from the Small Claims Docket—we guarantee it . . .

THE LAST CIGAR

by DUFFY CARPENTER

The hearing was set for 7:30 P.M., and from the snap of Mr. Kilgore's watch case I knew it must now be 7:40. He had been impatiently checking the time every five minutes since he had entered the small, drab, government-green room and taken one of the chairs opposite me at the linoleum-topped table. He was using the snapping of the watch case as a protest.

"We'll give Mr. Gresham just a few more minutes," I said, trying to look magisterial.

"Seems to me this fellow has had plenty of time. *I* was here on the dot."

"I appreciate your punctuality, Mr. Kilgore, but traffic can be difficult at this time of night."

"Well, young man," he sighed and nestled the watch into the pocket of his black-piped vest, "I'm sure if this case were before a real judge, the suit would have been dismissed on the failure of the plaintiff to appear."

"It says here that you agreed to put the suit to arbitration be-

© *1976 by Duffy Carpenter.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fore a referee. If you had preferred a 'real' judge instead of me, you had the right to decline arbitration."

"Well, I chose the most direct route to getting rid of this damn nuisance. Just how long are we going to give this—this Gresham fellow?"

"I could have you wait outside while I hear another case in the meantime."

That got him. "What!" He came forward in his chair. "Now look here, young fellow—"

"No, Mr. Kilgore," I said firmly, acting truly magisterial this time, "*you* listen here. This arbitration has the same weight as a hearing before the bench up the hall, and it demands the same respect."

"Well, I certainly didn't mean to be disrespectful." His voice had lost its tone of authority and he smiled thinly under his trim white mustache.

"Fine. Then let's dispense with the 'young fellow.' My name is right there on the desk plate: Jeffrey Corbett. My age is roughly yours minus ten years. I'm giving Mr. Gresham a reasonable amount of time to get here. Now you are welcome to sit here and wait, or you can use one of the benches outside."

"I'm sorry if I've breached some rule of etiquette, Mr. Corbett. Please forgive my impatience. Of course you *are* the authority here."

I nodded at him and went back to my papers somberly. Inside, I was giddy as a kid. I had put the man in his place and it felt good. I was congratulating myself on applying the "firm but fair" doctrine I had been exposed to in my lectures before my appointment as a Small Claims Court referee. Pretty good going, Corbett. Here I was, playing Solomon on my first case, and I'm not even a lawyer, let alone a judge.

How I got to be a referee is a long story involving a revised state statute, a fast-talking lawyer friend, and my own burgeoning public spirit. I'll make it short and, hopefully, sweet, like the justice I'm supposed to dispense.

Small Claims Court is a people's court. No lawyers are involved and most of the contests are over retail goods or services that are worth up to $1,000. Either the goods or the services are shoddy, never delivered, or never paid for. If you have a complaint, all you do is appear before the Clerk of the Court, and for $3 you have a summons sent to the person who owed you money, or repairs, or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whatever. For the public's convenience the cases are heard at night.

Well, only $3 as a down payment for justice makes for a very busy docket, and the judges are swamped, so they have set up the referee system. The referees are unpaid lawyers who hear cases and pass down a binding judgment. In a sense, the referee has more power than a judge. A judge's ruling can be appealed to a higher court, but a referee's cannot.

Then the State Assembly got into the act and I became involved indirectly. Then Bob Harrow, my luncheon partner, my lawyer and my friend, got me involved very directly.

"Jeff," he said to me over Eggs Benedict one afternoon, "you're always talking about the public getting involved, and here's your chance."

"What do I know about small claims? Besides, I'm not a lawyer; I'm a marketing guy."

"You're a vice-president of marketing with an M.B.A. and ten years' commercial experience. You don't have to be a lawyer any more under the new statute. You've had what—twelve, fifteen hours of business-law credits in school? You could breeze through the exam."

So he went on spinning his web. I don't know what particular point got me. Maybe it was the "You'll be an Officer of the Court, Jeff." I like to think it was a true public spirit. My wife says it was the little badge they gave me.

So here I sat in the Municipal Building, Room 407-A, after ten one-hour lectures by various judges, a two-hour state exam, with a spiffy blue-and-gold badge about the size of a quarter pinned in my wallet. Solomon was ready, Mr. Kilgore was ready, and his watch case was snapping again.

I was about to find for the defendant on a no-show on the plaintiff's part when there was a knock on the door. It opened and a sunburned face under close-cropped hair poked into the room and asked, "Mr. Corbett?"

"Yes. You are Mr. Gresham?"

He nodded and gave a weak smile that didn't quite go with his rugged face. He entered and crossed to the table, glancing for a moment at Kilgore. The contrast between the two men was remarkable. Kilgore looked the epitome of good taste: his finely tailored suit, his piped vest with conservative foulard tucked in at just the right angle—even the orange-red flower in his lapel gave

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him the air of Continental polish just short of fussiness.

The plaintiff, on the other hand, was obviously fresh from hard labor. His work boots were scuffed and dusty, and almost matched his faded chinos. When he turned to bring a chair forward, the back of his red warm-up jacket proclaimed to one and all that he had some athletic affiliation with *Tony's Bar and Grill.* As he sat facing me, I noticed that the left breast pocket bore the name *Al* in embroidered script letters. He put a massive hand on the table top as if to steady himself in strange surroundings.

What possible business these two could have with each other was beyond me. All the docket said was "Gresham vs. Kilgore—Return or replacement of goods valued at $51.00."

"Sorry I'm late, sir," Gresham said. "Got caught up in traffic just outside Burns Park and lost fifteen minutes. We get a lot of folks out at the park during the summer months. I'm supposed to get off at six, but being on the groundskeeping staff and all those picnickers—well, I'll tell you. Not that I walk around with an idiot stick picking up papers and trash. I'm an assistant gardener."

"Yes, we understand, Mr. Gresham," I interrupted his flow of explanation. During the lectures we had been trained to keep extraneous matters at a minimum. "Now you filed a suit against Mr. Kilgore here in the amount of $51.00. What is the merchandise, sir?"

"A cigar." Gresham looked at me in shock as if I should have spent a week boning up on his case.

"One cigar?"

"Well, that's all that was left. But it's not just any cigar, your Honor, it's a Superba Corona Deluxe."

"And it's worth fifty-one dollars?"

Kilgore cleared his throat and said, "I dispute that. It's an arbitrary and inflated value."

"Please, gentlemen, one at a time. You'll get your chance, Mr. Kilgore. Now, Mr. Gresham—by the way, don't call me 'your Honor'—why don't you start at the beginning and tell me briefly what this is all about."

"Sure. Sorry about the 'your Honor.' Well, back in 1958—"

"Hold it." I put up my hand again. "Do we have to go back seventeen years?"

"Well, that's when my wife gave 'em to me, in 1958. If you're gonna understand the whole thing I've got to start there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Very well, but remember; I said 'briefly'."

"Sure thing. So in 1958 my wife, Camille—that's a flower you know, only she ain't got TB like in the movie. Although she's got a smoker's hack, I can tell you. Them butts is coffin nails like I tell her all the time."

"Unless your wife figures in this, Mr. Gresham, I don't think we need to go into her smoking habits."

"Sure she figures in. She give me the cigars, didn't she?"

"One cigar in 1958?"

Gresham tossed back his head and chuckled, then looked at me as one would look at an inattentive child. "No, not one cigar. Three dozen of 'em. Three dozen Superba Corona Deluxes. For our tenth wedding anniversary present. I give her a swell trip to—"

"Let's stick to the cigars, Mr. Gresham."

"Sure, sure thing. Well, I'll tell you I was tickled pink with those cigars. They're the best money can buy. But I'm no pig about 'em. I mean, at seven bucks a throw, you don't sit down and smoke up a storm."

"I thought you said one cigar was worth $51.00?"

"Naw, Mr. Corbett, that was before Fidel Castro got into the picture and they cut off the importing of Havana cigars. On the open market today they'd go for around fifty bills each easy."

"I dispute—"

"Please, Mr. Kilgore," I said, and he became silent.

"The extra buck," Gresham went on, "is for gas coming down here and back. I'm entitled to that."

"At the moment, Mr. Gresham, I don't know what you're entitled to or what Mr. Kilgore has to do with all this."

"He sold them to her. He owns the cigar store downtown."

"Ye Olde Tobacconist Shoppe." Kilgore amplified each "e."

"Yeah, that's it. But when I make out the form for the Clerk of the Court last week, he said it would be better if I serve papers on an individual rather than a company."

"Yes, I know how Small Claims works," I told him. "Now let's move along quickly, please. Your wife bought thirty-six cigars in 1958. Then what?"

"I conserved 'em. At seven bucks a toss, why be a pig? So I limit myself to a stogie a month. I'll tell you I looked forward to it like a drunk to booze. Then in 1960 Castro takes over Cuba and if not for that we wouldn't be here today.

"So there I am with only a few Superba Corona Deluxes left

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and no more in sight. Then Mr. Kilgore runs an ad in the *Gazette* saying he'll store any cigars bought from him free of charge in his humidity lockers, which I think is real swell of him and I take him up on it. So once a year I go down to his shop on my wedding anniversary and take out one cigar and enjoy it to beat hell.

"Now this year is really special because it's the last Superba Corona I'm ever gonna taste. Well, down I go, and lo and behold they tell me sorry, bud, but the cigars have been swiped. You can imagine what that news did to me! Al Gresham, I said to myself, why should you suffer because this man here didn't protect your goods? And I check around and find out that you can smuggle Superba Coronas in from Europe for about fifty bucks a cigar. Then Camille, that's the wife, she says to go down to Small Claims Court and make Mr. Kilgore cough up. So that's the story, Mr. Corbett."

Another thing they had told us in our training classes was that a Small Claims Court was like a three-ring circus. All I needed was a top hat and a whip. I looked at Kilgore, who was externally calm and aloof, but then so are volcanoes until just before eruption.

"Pardon my ignorance, gentlemen," I said; "but can you keep a cigar fresh for fifteen years? I've gotten a few from friends when their wives have had babies, and they go dry and stale in a week or so."

Kilgore looked down his nose at me. "The new fathers usually buy what they think are expensive cigars, but they're only around twenty-five cents apiece. Cigars, Mr. Corbett, premiere cigars, are like fine wine. Kept under the proper conditions, they mellow with age."

"That's for sure," Gresham agreed. "Hey, that's a Flamingo flower you got in your lapel, ain't it?"

It didn't seem possible that Kilgore could have looked more surprised and superior than he had before, but he must have a reserve somewhere. "*Jacobina suberecta,*" he said, pronouncing the Latin like an actor.

"Yeah, I knew it was a Jaco-something or other. Comes from Brazil and tough to grow. We tried 'em last season in the greenhouses out at the park—"

"Mr. Gresham." I raised my voice. "We are going to be here all night if we keep wandering off the main subject. Now, Mr. Kilgore, may I hear your side?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The tobacconist shook his head slightly in disgust and said, "When trade with Cuba was stopped in 1960, it meant of course that fine Cuban cigars were lost to the aficionado. In fact, many of my wealthier clients foresaw the problem when things went sour for Batista in early 1959, and started buying in bulk. To accommodate them, I offered to store their cigars in our Humida-chests free of charge. You see, if kept at a constant temperature of 65° with the humidity around 75%, they will stay fresh forever."

He reached into his inside jacket pocket, withdrew an ostrich-skin case, and extracted a folded piece of newsprint. When he put it on the table, I could see it was a two-column by three-inch advertisement.

"It was a good-will gesture on my part," he said, putting the case back in his pocket. "You will note, Mr. Corbett, that at the bottom of the ad there is a line stating that the cigars would be accepted for storage on the basis that I was not responsible for damage in the event of unforeseen events. Actually, that disclaimer was put in to protect me from claims that might grow out of a fire or power failure. I believe it also covers theft."

"The cigars were stolen?"

"Yes, sir, two weeks ago. The thieves entered at night and cleaned out the Humida-chests. It got little play in the *Gazette*, but that's the problem with one-newspaper towns."

"And the police investigated?"

"Certainly they did. It wasn't just the cigars that were missing. Some expensive meerschaum pipes and $150 from the cash register in the office were gone too. Now I'm sorry for this man's loss, truly I am, even though he calls them 'stogies.' He lost only *one* cigar. Think of the men who lost *hundreds*."

"Yeah, sure." Gresham grimaced. "They can trot off to Europe and buy more and smuggle 'em back in, but what does Al Gresham do, huh? I was looking forward to that last cigar. I can almost taste it right now."

"So can I," the tobacconist said. "The slow even burn of it, the heavenly aroma—"

"For Pete's sake, don't rub it in, will ya?" Gresham looked pained. "Well, how about it, Mr. Corbett?"

And now the rush to judgment, I thought.

"I'm sorry to say, Mr. Gresham, that the printed disclaimer in this advertisement is a clear public warning which discharges Mr. Kilgore from any liability. You stored your cigars at your own

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

risk. You said yourself that you responded to the ad, so you had to be or should have been aware of the disclaimer."

The poor man looked dejected and for the first time Kilgore was smiling. I found myself wondering how a judge feels on more important cases, where his decision can make or break people's hearts or pocketbooks or both. But Gresham wasn't finished.

"What about Bruno Accento's dog?" he asked, and both Kilgore and I looked stunned.

"Bruno Accento's dog?" I asked.

"Sure. Bruno, he lives down the street from me. He's got this big dog. A very nasty dog. Everybody's scared of that mutt. So Bruno hangs up a sign in his alley that says *Beware of the Dog*. Then what happens, the dog bites one of the Regan kids in the leg and there's all hell to pay. So Regan drags Bruno into court to pay for the doctor bills and Bruno brings the sign with him and shows it to the judge.

" 'Look at this, Judge,' he says. '*Beware of the Dog*, it says.' 'Nuts,' says the judge, 'you can't avoid responsibility by tacking up a sign.' And he makes Bruno ante up. Now as I see it, Bruno's sign and this paragraph in the paper add up to the same thing, so how come I lose?"

I suppose if I stay at this post long enough I'll learn to get tough, but this was my first case so I restrained the temptation of power and didn't tell them both to get the devil out of here."

"Mr. Gresham, I am not going to get involved in an interpretation of a case that has nothing to do with these proceedings. However, was the dog tied up all the time?"

"Naw, he ran around the alley all the time."

"All right, so Mr. Bruno—"

"Accento. Bruno's his first name. Funny thing, he's married to Regan's kid sister—"

"Yes, Mr. Gresham. Please. I assume the judge ruled in Regan's favor because Mr. Accento didn't show proper restraint of the dog. Children aren't expected to be able to read signs."

"The kid didn't have to read signs. It was his uncle's dog, for crying out loud."

"Okay." I thumped the desk with my fist in lieu of a gavel. "That's it. Finding for the defendant. No basis for liability. That will be all, gentlemen."

Kilgore got to his feet before Gresham and was heading toward the door when he suddenly stopped and turned to me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I apologize, Mr. Corbett, for my brusqueness when we were waiting for this fellow. He is not my normal run of customer, you know. Well, thank you." He took his homburg and left.

Exit, I thought, a first-class snob.

I had six more cases that night, but none could match the one about the last cigar. Two were against dry-cleaning stores for lost garments—finding for plaintiffs, value adjusted. Three were service-and-repair claims for a refrigerator, air conditioner, and floor linoleum. The sixth case was a little too complicated, and I referred it to a judge's court. It was about a fence built between two neighbors, one of whom had demanded half payment even though the other hadn't agreed to the fence in the first place. I wasn't about to get entangled in that mess, because I suspected it would involve an interpretation of boundary law, complete with a mile-high pile of legal precedents both for and against.

When the feuding neighbors left, I wrote up a brief report for the Chief Judge and decided to deliver it by hand to his chambers at the other end of the Municipal Building.

I was walking along the almost deserted corridors listening to the echo of my heels clicking, and reassessing my night's work. The cigar case was my first brush with reason over sympathy. I could have had Kilgore pay Gresham twenty bucks and God knows he could have afforded it. No, I told myself, that would have been a judicial error.

I turned left off the main corridor into a side hallway which I was sure was a shortcut to the other side of the building, and after walking a hundred yards down the well-polished tile, found I was wrong. I had walked smack into the Central Police Headquarters wing. I also walked smack into my luncheon buddy, Bob Harrow. He was talking with a short stocky man in a seersucker suit.

"Well, if it isn't the Chief Justice himself," Harrow greeted me. "How did it go, Jeff?"

"I thought I was a ringmaster, but it turns out I'm a lion trainer. Next time I'll bring a chair and a whip."

Both men laughed and the stocky one was introduced as Lieutenant Bill Donnagan of the City Detective Bureau. Harrow was there to get a client's son out of a drunk-driving rap.

"If you think you've got it rough, Mr. Corbett, you ought to look in on the police magistrate's court sometime. That *really* is a circus and a half."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Maybe, Lieutenant," I said, "but at least the judge has bailiffs around for protection. I had a gorilla for a plaintiff tonight and found against him. Suppose he decided to poke me in the nose?"

More laughter, and I told them about the Gresham-Kilgore hassle.

"Oh, the tobacco-shop heist," Donnagan remembered. "We had that on our case load for a couple of days. Straight professional job. Just cleaned the place out. As I remember, we had some flap from several high muckamucks about getting their cigars back. Cigars, yet. As if we didn't have enough to do with narcotics and muggings."

"Is the case closed?" I asked him.

"Might as well be. According to the owner—"

"Kilgore?"

"Right. According to him, even if we found the burglars, chances are the cigars would be ruined, with the hot weather we've been having. The case isn't closed—they never are when they're unsolved—but let's say we've put it on hold."

"Which is like saying forget about it," Harrow chuckled.

"No," the lieutenant corrected him. "It would be a good felony bust for us, but hell, it doesn't fit any of our MO's. We did a sweep on known burglars just to stop the flap." Donnagan's face broke into a broad smile. "A couple of them were insulted that they would be suspected of looting a cigar store. Professional pride, you know. How would you fence cigars, anyway?"

Donnagan left to take a phone call and Harrow declined my offer of a drink, so I dropped off the report in the Chief Judge's office and drove home.

When I cleared the city limits and hit the suburbs, the smell of carbon monoxide thinned a bit, and I caught a whiff of flowers in the hot summer night air. I knew I should be thinking of my regular job, the one I get paid for, but my mind kept drifting back to the cigar problem.

I found myself questioning my decision against Gresham, since I now knew this was an open-file police case. I also found myself disagreeing with Lieutenant Donnagan's appraisal that it was a mere batch of cigars. To aficionados, Superba Coronas were pure gold—even beyond gold, somewhere in that hazy half world of subjective values where the appetite makes things priceless and makes men daring.

I pulled into my driveway automatically. My mind was on other

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

things—things my eyes had seen and my ears had heard. Things trying to merge and mesh and focus themselves into an idea. When I got out of the car and crossed the lawn, I didn't have an idea, but I did have a hunch. If the hunch was right, I might go beyond my meager public service as a referee and trap a thief.

"That you, Jeff?" my wife called down from our bedroom.

"Yes. Be up in a minute. I have to make a phone call." I went into the den, scanned the bookcase, then pulled out a book. I checked a paragraph, then sat at the desk and dialed the phone.

"Lieutenant Donnagan, please," I asked and then waited a couple of minutes. "Lieutenant, this is Jeff Corbett. We met earlier this evening."

"The new referee. Hello again. You know, your mentioning the cigar-store case sent me back to the files out of curiosity."

"Get any new insights?"

"Nope. What can I do for you, Mr. Corbett?"

"I think I can do something for you. You said earlier that cigars couldn't be fenced, and would probably be ruined if the burglars didn't know how to take care of the cigars."

"So?"

"So suppose they weren't fenced. Suppose they were stolen by a cigar lover?"

"Then he'll have to do a lot of fast smoking or they'll go stale. I appreciate your help, but I must have given you the wrong impression about putting the case on hold. It was thoroughly investigated and we considered the cigar-loving aspect. We contacted the company that built the Humida-chest vaults at Kilgore's. There isn't another vault like that from here to Cincinnati. And we checked Cincinnati too. It came up clean."

"Suppose it was a private humidifier vault?"

"You're doing a lot of supposing, Mr. Corbett. None have been installed for a private party. Only for businesses."

"No, I don't mean a real humidifier vault. How about a greenhouse with constant temperature controls?"

He was silent for a few seconds and I quickly read him a paragraph out of the book I had taken from the shelf. When I finished, Donnagan said, "You know, that sounds crazy enough to be true. I'll get right on it, just to see how good a hunch player you are."

I told him I was a marketing man, which made me a professional hunch player. He told me he would get back to me. He didn't. I had to read about it in the *Gazette*'s morning edition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Daddy caught a crook," my youngest son, known as T.J., shouted, as most four-year-olds do. My wife told him to eat his breakfast. Meggin, our superior ten-year-old, was ignoring the whole thing as puerile (her word, not mine). David, seven, had already left for day camp.

My wife finished reading the story and put down the newspaper. "The police raided the greenhouse on your hunch? Suppose you had been wrong."

"But I wasn't. It had to be someone who loved cigars and knew a great deal about them. I didn't know if Kilgore had a greenhouse on his property, but he had a hard-to-grow flower in his lapel. Gresham mentioned it, and said it was from Brazil. That means lots of humidity. I read it right there in your book on plants. I looked up the Flamingo flower last night. It requires a temperature of 65° and a humidity of 75%."

"But Gresham worked in a greenhouse, didn't he? Wouldn't he be the obvious suspect?"

"No, my dear. How could he hide a load of cigars in a public hothouse undetected? Besides, a man who calls Superba Corona Deluxes 'stogies' isn't a true lover of fine cigars. And why would he file a suit against Kilgore if he had all the cigars he wanted? He also said that the municipal greenhouse hadn't had much luck with Flamingo flowers. If that was true, it meant his greenhouse didn't have the proper atmospheric conditions."

"The newspaper says Kilgore's greenhouse was crammed with cigars. Do you think he has planned this for fifteen years?"

"On a hunch again, no. He probably dreamed it up when his own personal supply ran out. Maybe he had been dipping into his rich customers' supplies."

"Daddy caught a crooo-oook." T.J.'s chant started again.

"Eat your breakfast," I told him.

"Why, Daddy? I don't like scrambled eggs."

"Eat them anyway."

"Why?"

"Because that's my ruling."

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

REDIVIVUS: Raymond Chandler, who died in 1959, almost comes to life again in a new biography by Frank MacShane. *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (Dutton, $12.50) is the first biography ever written about one of the towering figures of detective fiction. Back in 1963, Philip Durham wrote a brilliant critical analysis of Chandler's work, *Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go,* from which MacShane often quotes. He also quotes heavily from many Chandler letters and private papers (to which he had exclusive access), providing much original material of varying degrees of interest. Although the book is not what one could call colorfully written, it is an important book, obviously researched with care and thoroughness, and with affection for the subject. It is absolutely essential for an understanding of a complex personality.

REVIEWS: For a magazine devoted to such a narrow subject as reviews of mystery books to exist at all is surprising. But to know that it has a circulation in excess of 60,000 copies per issue is staggering. It is, nonetheless, true. The modest periodical is *Current Crime.* The British quarterly is edited and published by none other than Nigel Morland, the famous author of scores of mysteries, most notably the long-running series about Mrs. Pym, the feisty feminist detective who never heard or thought about the women's movement, having begun her career in England's pulp magazines in the 1920's; she's still active today. Subscriptions ($1 a year) and inquiries should be directed to Mr. Morland at *Current Crime,* P.O. Box 18, Bognor Regis, Sussex, P022 7AA, England.

Mr. Morland is also editor of *The Criminologist,* a quarterly devoted to the study of true crime and available only to official or professional organizations or individuals in the fields of law enforcement, criminology, law, forensic science, and medicine. The illustrations are often not for the casual browser. Subscriptions are available for $8 a year at *The*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Criminologist, Forensic Publishing Co., 9 Old Bailey, London, EC99 1AA, England.

REVISIT: Even if you've been to Great Britain, you've never done it the Murder Ink way. Dilys Winn, who runs a book shop in New York devoted entirely to mystery fiction, is organizing a Mystery Reader's Tour of Great Britain. Two, in fact. The first is scheduled for the last week in June, the second for the last week in August. The tours will include visits with mystery writers, midnight train rides, hunting for rare books, and many other mystery-oriented events. Further information, prices, schedules, etc., may be had from Miss Winn at Murder Ink, 271 West 87th St., New York.

RESPONSE: Many readers have expressed interest in The Mystery Library project of the University of California, San Diego. Requests for further information should be directed to Caleb A. Lewis, Director, New Media Programs, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California 92093.

© 1976 by Otto Penzler.

BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

This column is normally concerned with visual crimes—not modern painting, but murders that can be seen, as opposed to those that must be read. Generally, this presupposes a certain amount of movement, however slight, on the part of actors, whether in motion pictures, on the live stage, or on television.

There is a different type of visual crime, however, that cannot be ignored, nor should it be, and which is enjoying a new stature in recent days: the comic strip. Although comic books are less popular now than they were during the 1930's and 1940's, their place in popular culture having been usurped by television, they are, today, the objects of more study, research, and analysis than they have ever been.

Perhaps the most ambitious undertaking ever conceived in the comic art world, and a grandiose package surely never fantasized by comic artists in past decades, is a gargantuan publishing project launched by Macmillan. It is an eight-volume, two-million-word series called *The Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes,* and Volume 1 is devoted entirely to Batman ($19.95 hardbound, $9.95 paper). Michael L. Fleisher wrote it, as well as the other seven volumes in the set, and it can only be described in superlatives and numbers: 380,000 words, more than 1,100 articles, accounts of more than 1,000 adventures, over 200

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

illustrations. It may be more than you ever wanted to know about the caped crime-fighter, but for a true aficionado it is Eden.

The next book in the series, scheduled for fall publication, is devoted to Wonder Woman, eventually followed by Captain Marvel, Plastic Man, the Spirit, the Green Lantern, the Flash, Superman, Captain America, the Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch, Doctor Fate, the Hawkman, Starman, and the Spectre. Yoicks!

Another large and impressive-looking book, of more general interest, is *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* (Chelsea House, $30 for the one-volume edition, $42.50 for the larger two-volume edition), edited by Maurice Horn. In 800 9 x 12-inch pages, there are 1,200 entries covering the full gamut of the comics, with much attention paid to the detectives and superhero crime-fighters who have so colorfully battled evil through the years. Zounds!

In the 1940's there were no bloodier visions than the newspaper crime comics, with their mobs, machine guns, and dedicated police. Fawcett Paperbacks allows us to savor period carnage by one of the masters of this violent art at its height, Chester Gould. Their 3-volume strip-reprint *Dick Tracy's Greatest Cases* (each $1.25) catalogues the hawk-faced cop's homefront war against such adversaries as Shaky, Pruneface, the mountainous Mrs. Pruneface, and the lady spy called the Black Pearl. Interestingly, the criminals Gould so vividly created are not the omnipotent czars of the pulps, with tentacles reaching everywhere. They are vulnerable, fallible, petty, and often their schemes go astray. They wear no tuxedos, nor do they live in gilded hideaways; fate generally finds them in grim rented rooms, often scrounging for their next stake. They die alone, unglamorously. Gould's portraits are, within their cartoon frames, not too distorted from the criminal case histories of the day.

Another costumed superhero, the mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper who doubles as Superman, will be the subject of a major motion picture. Mario Puzo, who previously wrote a book about a different kind of character, the Godfather, will write the film script (reportedly for a fee of $350,000 plus 5 percent of the film's profits); the director will be Guy Hamilton, who formerly directed James Bond films.

© 1976 by Chris Steinbrunner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INTERVIEW: LAWRENCE TREAT

Lawrence Treat, the newly elected president of the Mystery Writers of America, is one of the first and best writers of the exacting mystery sub-genre known as the police procedural. He has written about twenty novels and several hundred short stories, ranging from the pulp era to the present day.

EQMM: When were you first called "the master of the police procedural"?

TREAT: It was Anthony Boucher who first gave me that tag. He thought that in the first police procedural novel I wrote, *V As in Victim,* I had started a whole new trend. It was sheer luck that I happened to fall into that form because I had just met two young laboratory research people. They were very helpful, and one of them is still one of my best friends. I took a seminar in police supervisory work and have a lovely diploma which shows that I completed the course. I call it my third degree, because I also have a college degree and a law degree.

EQMM: Did you ever practice law, or use it in your writing?

TREAT: I practiced for a very short time. I always wanted to write. When I was in law school, I was writing poetry, then quit law to write. When the moment of truth came, I realized that, first, I was not a good poet and, second, even if I had been I would never make a living out of it. I went into Brentano's in Paris and saw some detective magazines. I told myself this should be easy, with my law background. So I decided I would learn my trade and write a story a day for one month.

EQMM: What is the most important thing you had to learn in order to write procedural stories, and especially about your famous cop, Mitch Taylor?

TREAT: The police mind. When I had met these two people, they suggested I come down to the police labs at night. And while I got a great deal of specific information, what was most valuable was a point of view—how the police felt about things. I never realized, for instance, how closed the police lines are—how they operate as professionals and consider everybody else a civilian; how a cop doesn't like to go out gung-ho and get into a heroic situation. He wants to get out of work, to come home at five o'clock and have a nice evening watching television or drinking beer or sitting with his wife and children or whatever. This became the origin of Mitch Taylor. Mitch is interested in his family, and does a good job, and is proud of his work. But, basically, he uses most of his canniness to get out of work, to make life easy and pleasant. I think this insight into one policeman's mind, his psychology, is far more important than the so-called procedural.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

SNAKE, by James McClure. Harper & Row, $7.95.

Back to thrill readers of *The Gooseberry Fool, The Caterpillar Cop* and *Steam Pig*, Lt. Kramer and Sgt. Zondi of the South African police investigate the death of a stripper with a flair for herpetology.

"McClure's plotting, characterization, and mordant view of South African society make SNAKE one of his best."—*Stanley Ellin.*

"*Snake* is just as ingenious, well constructed, rudely witty and exciting as the previous four novels and, like them, throws some unexpected light on South African life."—*The Times Literary Supplement* (London).

"The best novels about South Africa today are McClure's stories about the Trekkersburg police."—*The London Sunday Times.*

KILMAN'S LANDING, by William Judson. Mason/Charter, $7.95.

Kilman's Landing. Pop. 408. George Waddy can't make sense of the place. It's not on the map. There's no visible industry, but everyone has money to burn. The whole town lives in fear of ol' Miz Cooley, the paralyzed woman who runs the general store. As George shakes off his amnesia and begins asking questions, he uncovers a bizarre conspiracy between the government, the Mob, business and Kilman's Landing, where death has its price. Now, George must join the #1 industry of "Killville," or die himself.

A spellbinding story "as straight and fast as a bullet."—*Kirkus Reviews.*

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL MURDER, by Kin Platt. Random House, $6.95.

Private eye Max Roper must fight for his life as he matches brains—and brawn—with karate experts, weight lifters, body builders, and college athletes in this latest Roper mystery. When somebody drops a quarter-ton of iron onto the reigning Mr. Universe during his final workout preceding the competition, an innocent gym attendant is accused of the murder. Luckily, the gym is the same one where Roper does his exercising, so he is on hand to sift through the suspects, including several jealous competitors and a bevy of exercising ladies with their own reasons for wanting the Superbody more dead than alive.

LEGEND IN GREEN VELVET, by Elizabeth Peters. Dodd, Mead, $7.95.

Edinburgh—with its ancient history of deception and murder—and the Scottish highlands—with their austere beauty—provide the setting for this tale of a young Scots laird and an American girl who, from the moment they meet, are pursued by mysterious and deadly forces.

"What devotee of mystery and adventure could ask for anything more than a couple of hours in the company of Ms. Peters?" wrote Barbara Bannon in *Publishers Weekly* when reviewing her recent book, *Crocodile on the Sandbank.* This newest Peters' thriller treats readers to an invigorating chase, a charming love affair, and two sensational surprise endings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TITLE NO.	AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
75435	Asimov, Isaac	MURDER AT THE ABA	Doubleday	$7.95	$6.35
77760	Hoch, Edward D.	BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR—1976	Dutton	8.95	6.95
52164	Judson, William	KILMAN'S LANDING	Mason/Charter	7.95	6.35
77792	Kaye, Marvin	BULLETS FOR MACBETH	Saturday Review Press	6.95	5.50
77164	Larteguy, Gean	PRESUMED DEAD	Little, Brown	9.95	7.95
77565	Lieberman, Herbert	CITY OF THE DEAD	Simon & Schuster	8.95	6.95
75452	Lovell, Marc	BLIND HYPNOTIST	Doubleday	5.95	4.75
77913	McClure, James	SNAKE	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
78057	Pentecost, Hugh	FOURTEEN DILEMMA	Dodd, Mead	5.95	4.75
78062	Peters, Elizabeth	LEGEND IN GREEN VELVET	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
53320	Platt, Kin	THE BODY BEAUTIFUL MURDER	Random House	6.95	5.50
77326	Roseman, Mill	DETECTIONARY	Viking Press	10.00	8.00

Dear Reader—

YOUR HELP WILL BE GREATLY APPRECIATED!

Could you tell us more about yourself and your mystery reading interests? By taking just a few minutes to complete and mail your answers, you will assist us in continuing to bring you the very best in mystery entertainment. Thank you.

1. ☐ male ☐ female
2. Age: ☐ under 18 ☐ 25-38 ☐ 46-54
   ☐ 18-24 ☐ 39-45 ☐ 55-65 ☐ over 65
3. How long have you been a reader of EQMM? ___ years.
4. What other mystery publications do you read? ☐ Mike Shayne
   ☐ Alfred Hitchcock
   ☐ other_____
5. How many books do you buy each year (estimate)? _____
   A. Of these how many are mystery and suspense?_____
   B. How many are hardbound_____paperback_____?
6. Do you buy more books from ☐ Book Stores or ☐ Book Clubs?
7. Are you a member of any of these Book Clubs?
   ☐ The Mystery Guild ☐ The Gardner Mystery Library
   ☐ Detective Book Club ☐ Book-of-the-Month Club
   ☐ Literary Guild of America ☐ Other_____
8. Who is your favorite mystery author(s)? _____

PLEASE MAIL TO:
E. Sullivan, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
229 Park Avenue South, NY, NY 10003

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM BOOK DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT

The titles which we are offering this month are listed on the left hand page. These books are regular publishers' editions, the very same as those available in bookstores. Only those books which appear can be ordered; we are not in a position to order other books so please do not include any others on the Order Form.

HOW TO ORDER:

1. Fill in the quantities you wish to order of each title.
2. Fill in the "Discount Price" column by multiplying the quantity of each title ordered by the "Discount Price."
3. Add these totals and fill in the sub-total.
4. Fill in the shipping and handling charges by mutiplying the total number of books ordered by the appropriate charge, i.e., 1 to 3 books: 60¢ per book. 4 or more books: 35¢ per book.
5. Fill in sales tax if applicable.
6. Fill in the "Grand Total" of your order.

SHIPPING:

1. All orders will be shipped within 24 hours after they are received.
2. Out of stock titles will be shipped within 30 days.
3. All orders not completed in 30 days will be cancelled and money will be refunded.

PAYMENT:

1. Please enclose a check or money order with your order.

For Office Use Only

Check _____

M.O. _____

Other _____

Issue _____

SEND ORDER TO.

EQMM BOOK DEPT
P.O. BOX 17206
NASHVILLE, TN. 37217

ORDER FORM Please send me the following books:

Quantity	Title Number	Title	Discount Price

SHIPPING AND HANDLING CHARGE 1—3 Books add 60¢ per book 4 or more books add 35¢ per book	SUB-TOTAL
	POSTAGE & HANDLING Books at
Add 5% for delivery in Tennessee. Elsewhere, add sales tax applicable.	SALES TAX If Applicable
	GRAND TOTAL

SHIP TO:

Your Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ **Zip** _____

Enclosed is my check or money order for $ _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE POE-TIC CORNER

ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS

By JOHN H. DIRCKX

Tom Jenkins paid respectful court
To wealthy Eunice Pratt;
She let him think she didn't care,
And there's an art to that.

He gave her sweets and picture books,
And flowers for her hat;
He let her think that *he* was rich,
And there's an art to that.

At length Tom led her down the aisle,
This prim aristocrat;
She made it look like sacrifice,
And there's an art to that.

In six short months Death took the bride,
And left Tom standing pat.
He made it look like suicide,
And there's an art to that.

© *1976 by John H. Dirckx.*

ALL-DAY SUCCOR

by MARK GRENIER

When the blame for unsavory acts must be placed,
And the Lollipop Cop must affix it,
We can trust him to handle the matter with taste,
'Cause he sticks to a case till he licks it.

© *1976 by Mark Grenier.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But one day I found another key" . . .

THE BOX

by ISAK ROMUN

Working for Stromberg was like being locked in a box. No matter how you tried, you couldn't get out. That's how I felt—as if I were in a box, and only Stromberg had the key.

But one day I found another key, one that would unlock the lid of the box just as effectively as Stromberg's key. Which he would never use. So I would use my own.

My key was death.

Once I had made the decision, I found it quite easy to live with. With something like gusto I attacked the matter of a plan—how I would kill Stromberg. It should not be something complex or difficult. Simple plans are usually the safest. But I had no experience.

Oh, certainly, I had read mystery stories, had even in my mind concocted ways and means of putting to rest the fictional victims I met on the printed page. And with more panache than many of their creators! But there's a difference between a cold, paper thing and a warm, pulsing human organism. Not that Stromberg could be called warm and pulsing. He was like a fish, and it was my intent to hook that fish.

But how to hook him? I thought of poison. Traceable. A hit-and-run accident. Unpredictable—Stromberg might not die. A gun. Noisy and messy. Besides, none of these methods passed the test of simplicity. I determined to use materials and circumstances at hand.

I was evaluating the merits of a push down a stairway when Hopkinson came up to me. "I'll need two dollars from you," he said. I asked why. "Stromberg's farewell gift. He's put in for retirement. Lucky you. I hear he said you were the only man to fill his shoes." Did I hear right? Was it true?

It *was* true! Suddenly I was outside my box. I would not have to kill Stromberg. Matter of fact, he began to look quite human to

© 1976 by Isak Romun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me. I realized with remorse that what I thought were constraints on me were, in reality, his way of testing me, of training me. That good fellow really had my best interests at heart. At his retirement bash we posed for a parting photo, smiling, each with an arm about the other's shoulder.

I've been chief now for almost five years. But don't think it's been all fun. By no means. When you become a supervisor, you take on something called responsibility. Something only you have. It's up to you to see that the job gets done, that your section functions smoothly.

I swear, though, there are times I throw up my hands in despair. I'm pressured to produce, but with what must I produce? A bunch of incompetents who'd rather hang around the water cooler than do an honest day's work.

The worst is Hopkinson. He said a strangely unsettling thing to me the other day. He said working for me is like being locked in a box.

Perhaps I should check with the personnel office about retirement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a NEW short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Margaret, sixty years old, got the story through her mother who knew the maid who was the only other person in the house and who promised she would never tell a soul . . . but you know how those things are—"hearsay twice removed" . . .

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Margaret came into my study talking. I had heard her grumbling approach up the back stairs from the kitchen, the signal that my eleven o'clock mug of tea was on the way. The price I would have to pay was a certain amount of inattentive listening, a smile or two, and a couple of noncomittal ahums.

She bodied open the door and there was the radiant little girl's smile in the 60-year-old face. "I thought you'd like a cup of tea"—as if the idea was new that morning instead of a time-honored tradition.

"Thank you, Margaret." It was one of my standard lines; most of the improvised script would be hers.

"I'll dust in here when you're out for lunch. The vacuum cleaner needs bags but I can get those when I go downstreet tomorrow." Downstreet. After half a lifetime in the city Margaret retained many of the small-town locutions she had learned as a child.

"They have the oil tank leaking across the road. It's gone and drained itself during the night and now they've got no heat and no hot water till somebody comes and fixes it. Have you noticed how the blossoms are out so early on the chestnut tree, they'll all be nipped off if we get a late frost, and then . . ."

Old Margaret regularly began talking the minute she entered the house at 8:30 in the morning and her monologue continued uninterrupted throughout the day. You might call it an unaccept-

© 1976 by William Bankier.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

able distraction for a writer, but she has been with me for 15 years as housekeeper, and her nattering drone is as much a part of the pulse of my existence as the hum of the central heating. Besides, she is as solid as an NFL linebacker and has a mad focus to her eyes—not the sort of person to be dismissed lightly. What's more, she knew my father and always speaks well of him.

"I'll take it here, Margaret," I said from my armchair, and she turned from the desk and brought me the steaming mug. "I'm reading this morning, not writing."

She glanced at the cover of the book spread open on my lap and I suppose the name Lizzie Borden in the book's title caught her eye. Her lips formed the name silently, then she said aloud,

"Not much of what they say about that poor woman is true. It was a blessing they never convicted her, but still most people go along believing she really did kill her mother and father. Of course Lizzie wanted it that way instead of having people know what *really* happened."

I was so intrigued that I found myself encouraging a conversational exchange with Margaret. "I've never read anything to that effect," I said.

"And you wouldn't. It's never been written down. But I got it through my mother who knew the Bordens' maid, Bridget Sullivan. My family lived in Butte, Montana, where Bridget ended up. Bridget promised Lizzie she'd never tell a soul, but as she got older she felt she had to share it, and my mother was her closest friend. I was just a wee thing then, so I suppose they thought they could talk in front of me and it would all go over my head. But I've always remembered the story."

"I'm fascinated. Sit down, Margaret, and tell me what really happened between Lizzie Borden and her parents." If there was a trace of sarcasm in my tone, it either escaped her or she ignored it.

"I will, then," she said. "I'll just go and fetch my tea first." And she was gone, pounding down the back stairway, her voice fading into the distance as she trailed her cloud of words like smoke from a thundering locomotive.

I waited, reminding myself that any story that Margaret could tell would be hearsay twice removed, and after a blurring separation in time. The events that took place in the Borden home in Fall River, Massachusetts, on that oppressively hot day in 1892 had been well documented at the time and studied ever since. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he book I was reading made it clear that Lizzie had delivered onflicting testimonies at the inquest and subsequently. The au- hor took this to mean she was guilty and trying not very skill- ully to cover her tracks. Now here was Margaret suggesting that izzie had indeed fabricated a story to hoodwink the authorities nd the public—but for some other reason.

Margaret came back into the study with her double-size tea nug and a plate of jam turnovers, my favorites from the pastry hop on the corner. I placed a second armchair near mine and noved a small table to take the pastries and our tea. Margaret at down, drew the skirt of her flowered smock across her knees, nd picked up her tea, holding it quite elegantly as she turned er head this way and that, seeing my familiar workroom from a ew angle. Watching her, I realized that the woman had not pent her whole life waxing floors and scrubbing bathtubs.

"This is very nice," she said. That was all. She sipped her tea nd the room tingled with silence. I wondered if the cat had got er tongue on this one occasion when I was eager to listen to her. decided to set the stage.

"All right now. The book I'm reading tells us that Lizzie had a notive of sorts for killing her stepmother, a woman she had never ared much for. Five years earlier, Mr. Borden, whom Lizzie loved ery much, had signed over one-half of a house he owned to Mrs. Borden. Lizzie looked on this as a betrayal and ever afterwards here was hostility between her and the older woman. Adjoining loors were kept locked. Harsh words were exchanged.

"Then," I continued, "just before the murders Mr. Borden pre- ared to make the same mistake again. He arranged to place in is wife's name a farmhouse in Swansea, a summer residence Liz- ie had loved to visit as a child. This was said to be the last traw. And on the morning that Mrs. Borden was to leave the ouse and go to the bank where papers would be signed, Lizzie Borden, it was alleged, took the ax and gave her mother forty whacks. In fact, it was more like eighteen. Then when her father ame home to see why his wife had not shown up at the bank, izzie murdered him too."

Margaret was regarding me skeptically with her fine Irish face. Drops of perspiration, caused no doubt by the hot tea, beaded her road forehead. I added, "Of course, Lizzie was subject to attacks f epilepsy during which she could have performed such an act nd scarcely remembered doing it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Margaret set down her mug. "Well, it's a great mishmash of misinformation you've gotten hold of. I don't know about the attacks, but as for the rest of it, about the only true thing you said was that Lizzie Borden loved her father. And he loved her. Did you know she gave him her school ring when she was a little girl—girls usually give it to a boy friend—and he wore it for eighteen years. Had it on his little finger when he died. Now there's a sad thing."

"Yes. I read that in here."

She sneered at the book. "Then it has *some* truth in it. Myself, I never read much, if at all."

"I'm ready to hear your version."

"It's not a version. It's what Bridget Sullivan herself, Lizzie Borden's maid who was the only person in the house with her that day, it's what she told my mother."

"Yes."

"You have to realize that the stepmother was a great, fat, lazy creature who scarcely went out of the house. She just sat around inside and ate herself huge. Weighed two hundred pounds or more when she died."

I nodded. "She's described in the book as a compulsive eater."

"That's a fact. It's also a fact that Lizzie didn't like her. But she never killed her. All that nonsense about houses being signed over—well, it may be true. But Lizzie was missing nothing. There was plenty of money and she had her share. No, there was a much more obvious suspect around but everyone overlooked him."

"Uncle John?" I asked, recalling the visitor in the house, the original Mrs. Borden's brother. "John Morse had been considered a suspect by the police at first but was exonerated when his alibi checked out."

"Gracious no, much closer to home. Who kills wives anyway? Husbands do. Mr. Borden was a fastidious man, and frugal. The sight of this great bloated creature occupying his house must have eaten away at him. Anyway, he was the one who took the ax to Mrs. Borden that morning. For no other reason than that he wanted her dead."

"And then," I said, "I suppose he struck himself with the ax several times, thereby committing suicide."

"Of course not. That's where Lizzie comes in."

"She killed her father? You said she loved him. Her ring on his finger—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't look so baffled. A writer should appreciate how people act. Picture it. Borden kills his wife in the morning. Then he goes out and visits the bank to establish *his* alibi. That was what the signing was all about—it put him in the clear. Why would he be suspected of killing a person he was so generously giving a house to?"

"It's a theory."

"It's a fact. While he was out, Lizzie discovered the body. Bending over it, she got blood on her dress and had to change it."

"The dress she burned in the kitchen stove later."

"If she burned a dress, that was it. Then she waited for her father, knowing that he must have done it and that he could never get away with it. The police would question him, he would be arrested and tried. And even if he got off, his reputation in the community would be ruined. Lizzie had plenty of time to consider the shame the family would have to bear. And in those days, in Fall River society, this was unthinkable."

I shook my head. "So she killed her father. Even though she loved him."

"*Because* she loved him. Loved him so much she could not bear the idea of people knowing he was a murderer. *One* body meant Borden had killed his wife. *Two* bodies would allow people to believe a maniac had gotten in the house."

"So Borden killed his wife and Lizzie killed him."

"Exactly. Which I call justice." Margaret got up, loaded our empty mugs on the pastry plate, and went to my study door.

"But in seeking to avoid a scandal," I said, "a blot on the family name, she created a worse one."

"She never dreamed people would suspect *her* of doing such a terrible thing," Margaret said. "But they did, and there's the pity of it."

Alone again, I thought of this new scenario. It was entirely circumstantial, of course. But so was the original case against Lizzie. I picked up a pen and began scratching on a piece of paper.

Andrew Borden took the ax
And gave his woman forty whacks.
Then loving Lizzie, like as not,
Hacked out justice on the spot.

Later in the day I went out into the back garden and moved a deck chair into the rectangle of spring sunlight near the wood shed. As I placed myself, I heard the familiar thump and clatter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which told me Margaret was splitting firewood on the other side of the shed. She came by and stood over me just before I closed my eyes.

"You aren't going to go writing down any of what I told you, are you?" she asked.

I only wanted to fall asleep in the sun. "Don't worry about it, Margaret," I said.

"But I do worry. It was a secret Bridget told us. And I am sworn to protect it on the grave of me own mother."

She said this in a heavy voice and then she walked away with a pile of kindling clutched in one massive arm and the hatchet hanging from her other hand.

Be damned, I'll write the story anyway. I won't be subtly threatened by my own housekeeper. Besides, I have it on Margaret's own word: she never reads much, if at all.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Ferrars, E. X.	THE CUP AND THE LIP	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	$5.95	6/11
Foley, Rae	WHERE HELEN LIES	Dodd, Mead & Co.	6.95	6/7(
Lockridge, Richard	DEAD RUN	J. B. Lippincott Co.	7.95	6/14
Lovell, Marc	THE BLIND HYPNOTIST	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	5.95	6/18
McClure, James	SNAKE	Harper & Row	8.95	6/2

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

continuing the new series of Inspector Petrella stories by

MICHAEL GILBERT

"It was an instinctive reaction, born of experience, sharpened by the habit of joining together apparently unassociated scraps of information—which is the basis of all good police work" . . .

The next in the series concerns an official and confidential police report that got into the wrong hands and led to "Rough Justice" . . .

LICENSE PLATE UGC 368M

by MICHAEL GILBERT

It was seven o'clock on a misty November evening when the convoy reached the corner of Jamaica Road and Tunstal Passage. The corner building was the one belonging to Merriam's, who are manufacturers of anchors, cables, and other massive maritime ironwork. First came a police car, then the truck carrying the new press, a squat piece of machinery weighing about five tons, then Mr. Fawke, the managing director of Merriam's, in his private car. He spotted that there was some sort of delay ahead and jumped out to investigate.

The doors of Messrs. Merriam's private goods hoist were at the side of the building and opened onto Tunstal Passage. Above them jutted out a short fixed overhead crane. The plan had been to use this crane to lift the press off the truck and draw it into the hoist, which would then take it up to the second story, where a gang of men waited with rollers to coax the press into its final resting place. The whole plan, including a modification in the width of the press to enable it to get into the hoist, had been worked out with meticulous care.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" said the driver of the truck. Right in front of the entrance to the hoist a private car was parked.

© 1976 by Michael Gilbert.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Fawke glared at the parked car. It was not only obstructing the doors of the hoist, it was blocking the narrow width of Tunstal Passage, thus preventing the truck from backing down it.

"I suppose it's locked."

The car, which was a newish dark-blue four-door Austin, was securely locked.

"You've got keys and things, haven't you?" said Mr. Fawke to the police driver. "You use them to drive away parked cars."

"I haven't got anything with me," said the driver.

"What about a tow truck? There's one at Simmon's Garage."

"The thing is, do you have the right to move it?"

"For God's sake, it's blocking my own hoist!"

"We got twenty cars behind us now," said the driver of the truck helpfully.

"Must you use your hoist?" asked the constable. "What about taking it in through the front entrance?"

"And up two flights of stairs?" said Mr. Fawke. "Talk sense, man."

Down Jamaica Road horns were beginning to sound in the mist.

"You must do something," said the constable. "If you can't get it in, you'll have to move on."

One of the men said, "What we might do is lift the car up with the crane. Then we could swing it out of the way, see."

Mr. Fawke said, "Good idea. Let's try it. And if it hurts the car it serves the owner damn right for leaving it in such a stupid place. Fix the hook onto the front bumper, Jim."

"I don't know as you ought to do that," began the constable.

A figure was approaching up the passage.

"Some trouble here?" said the newcomer pleasantly. "Oh, my car in the way? If you'll ask your man to clear the entrance I'll back it out. Thank you. Sorry to have been a nuisance. Urgent call."

They saw now that the car had a sticker on the windshield. *Doctor. On duty.*

Only after the car was gone did it occur to the constable, who was busy clearing the traffic jam in Jamaica Road, that he had failed to get the doctor's name. He had, however, made a note of the license number of his car: UGC 368M.

Detective Sergeant Milo Roughead brought in a sheaf of papers and laid them on Chief Inspector Petrella's desk with all the de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

corum of a butler bringing the morning mail to a ducal breakfast table. Beside the papers he placed a copy of the Stockwell and Clapham *Courier*.

Milo Roughead was a newcomer to Patton Street polite station. When he had first arrived, Petrella, who had noted from his Details of Education and Previous Service that Roughead was an Etonian, had been prepared to dislike him; but he had found the new man entirely disarming.

"What's this little lot about?" he said.

"Most of it's routine stuff, sir," said Milo. "There's a letter from a Mr. Raby."

"Yes, we know Mr. Raby," said Petrella.

"Then there's a copy for information of a report from the boys in blue—"

"From the uniformed branch."

"I mean, sir, from the uniformed branch," agreed Milo unabashed. "It's about an incident in Tunstal Passage last night. It looked like being something of a box-up, but it came out all right in the end. Oh, and Inspector Blaikie from Junction wants a word with you."

"What's in that newspaper?"

"I thought you might like to see that. It's another letter from Mr. Mayflower."

"About us?"

"About us," agreed Milo.

Mr. Mayflower was an untiring writer to the press. He acted as a local ombudsman, drawing attention to matters which he thought required airing. He seemed to devote a good part of his time to the police and their shortcomings.

"It is a source of amazement to me," wrote Mr. Mayflower, "that the police who, as we are constantly assured, are undermanned and overworked do not concentrate their attention on the more serious crimes. Nine-tenths of their energies appear to be dissipated in pursuing misdemeanors of no conceivable importance. Trivial offenders against parking regulations, shop-opening hours, and licensing laws are pursued with untiring zeal. Hours and days of police time are wasted, not only in the detection of these earth-shattering matters but in subsequent attendance at court—"

It was an old complaint. And Petrella recognized that there was an element of truth in it. Particularly the bit about attendance at court. But Mr. Mayflower had chosen the wrong whipping boy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The fault did not lie with the police. They could not pick and choose which offenders they pursued. A more rational system of law and administration—

"Was there anything else, sir?" said Milo politely.

"You'd better tell Blaikie to come up. We don't want to keep him hanging about."

Inspector Blaikie was a railway policeman. Most of his work was concerned with the pilfering done in the two big depots in Petrella's district. They had done a lot of jobs together, Blaikie and Petrella, and Petrella liked the dry little man who saved the railways at least twenty times his own salary every year of his working life and got few thanks for it. This time, however, it was something else.

"My man was coming back from the terminal at Grain," he said. "You know they travel in mufti sometimes to pick up ticket bilkers. Well, he noticed this man who got on at Graystone Halt—that's a little station on the marsh between Cooling and Cliffe. When they reached London Bridge they both got out, and our chap heard this man say to the ticket collector, 'I'm sorry I hadn't time to buy a ticket. I got on at Gravesend.' So my man intervenes, and says, 'I think you're mistaken, sir. I happen to know you got on at Graystone Halt.' Without batting an eyelid the man says, 'Exactly, that's what I said. Graystone.'

"It would be easy to mishear it," said Petrella.

"Certainly. But they're both absolutely certain they didn't. They swear he first said Gravesend, and said it distinctly. The upshot of it was, they took his name and address and reported it to me."

"What sort of man?"

"He was a doctor—Doctor Lovibond. He lives in your part of the world."

Petrella said, "Yes. I think I can place him. About sixty, reddish brown face, bushy gray eyebrows, gray mustache. Has done service in India."

"That's the man. Respectable citizen. Perfectly clean record."

"If your chap had waited a bit before he butted in and let him pay for a ticket from Gravesend you might have had a case. As it is, I don't believe you'll get anywhere with it."

"That's my view," said Blaikie. "We'd better drop it." He sounded relieved.

When he had gone, Petrella started on the various dockets and reports. The officious Mr. Raby, until his retirement the manager

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of one of the local banks, reported that a shop called Bloom's Antiques in Tooley Street was selling replicas in gold of the medallion struck to commemorate the recovery of King Edward the Seventh from appendicitis.

"It appears to me," wrote Mr. Raby in his neat handwriting, "that unless Bloom is an authorized dealer in bullion, which I beg leave to doubt, he is acting in contravention of Section 2 of the Exchange Control Act of 1947. The objects relate to an incident which took place in 1901, so they cannot be described, in the words of Statutory Instrument Number 48 of 1966 as coins or objects of numismatic value more than one hundred years old."

Petrella took the report and placed it firmly at the bottom of his pending tray. He felt a growing sympathy with the views expressed by Mr. Mayflower in the Stockwell and Clapham *Courier*.

The last report concerned what Sergeant Roughead had described as the box-up in Tunstal Passage. Petrella read it rapidly and was on the point of throwing it into the Out Basket for filing when something stopped him.

Petrella was blessed, or cursed, with visual memory. It was the sort of memory which enabled him to recall telephone numbers, dates on documents, and details of that sort, usually quite unimportant. And he was certain that he had seen the license-plate number UGC 368M somewhere recently.

He concentrated for a moment on the problem. A newish dark-blue four-door Austin. He saw it, in his mind's eye, parked outside a house—a house not far from his own. A house on Craven Road. A doctor's house. That was right. The car belonged to Dr. Lovibond—the man who had made a mistake about his railway ticket.

It was a mild coincidence, the sort of thing that was always happening in real life. If Petrella had had more to do that morning he would have dismissed the matter from his mind entirely. In the end the action which he did take was to extract Mr. Raby's letter from the bottom of his pending tray, and send for Sergeant Roughead. He said, "Go and see Bloom's Antiques. It's a respectable little shop, as far as I know, run by a man named Friar. Find out what this is all about."

"Loosen him up a bit?"

"Certainly not," said Petrella. "Just ask him where he got these medallion things from."

When Milo had departed, Petrella put on his hat and coat, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked down to have a look at Tunstal Passage. Something was worrying him.

Tunstal Passage runs sharply downhill from its junction with Jamaica Road, between the flanks of two large buildings. One was Merriam's iron foundry. The other was a furniture warehouse. There were side doors to the yards of both of these buildings, after that a length of blank wall, then a pair of wooden gates that blocked the end of the passage. On the gates, in faded white lettering, Petrella could make out: *Waterside Properties, Limited.*

He got one foot onto a bollard, hoisted himself up, and looked over. Immediately in front of him was a row of shacks, the biggest being a Nissen hut, the smallest no larger than a toolshed. None of them looked habitable or inhabited. Beyond them he could see an expanse of gray flecked with flashes of white where Father Thames ran by in full flood.

Petrella came down off his perch and walked slowly back up the passage. What he was trying to work out was exactly what patient Dr. Lovibond could have been calling on at seven o'clock in the evening in Tunstal Passage.

"I thought it funny myself," said Mr. Friar, "but I didn't see anything illegal in it. This lady brought along six of them in an old case. Said her great uncle used to collect them. Heavy great things. Solid gold, no fooling. I got the last one here."

He unlocked his wall safe and brought out the medallion.

"Weighs just over five ounces. Six of them. Worth something these days, eh?"

Sergeant Roughead examined the medallion curiously. On one side was a conventional representation of the head of Edward VII. Hanoverian nose jutting defiantly over rakish beard. On the other side the date 1901 and the words *Pacis Amator.*

"I took one of them along to Francks," said Mr. Friar. "They looked it up for me in their catalogues. It's genuine, all right. See what it says on the back. Lover of Peace. That's what they thought of him. My old father used to sing a song about that." Mr. Friar threw back his head and croaked out, "There never was a King like Good King Edward: Peace with Honor was his motter: God Save the King."

Milo was enchanted. He said, "Do you know any more verses?"

"There was one about mothers and babies. I don't recall exactly how it went."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Milo recollected that he was there on duty and said, as sternly as he could, "You realize you're not supposed to deal in gold."

"These are antiques."

"Nothing's antique until it's a hundred years old. You'd better not sell this one until I've found out what the form is. I mean, until I've made a report."

"I suppose," said Petrella, "that one of them could be genuine and the other five could be modern copies of it. They wouldn't be difficult to make. And there's no way of dating gold. It's the only metal that doesn't age in any way at all."

"What would be the point?" said Milo. "Friar was simply selling them for their weight in gold anyway."

"The point," said Petrella, "is that he was able to sell them at all. And that someone was able to sell them to him. If you went along to a shop with a bar of gold weighing two pounds and tried to flog it, you'd have a lot of questions to answer, wouldn't you? But take along a set of six medals, in a nice old case, property of your late great-uncle, and nobody bothers. I suppose, by the way, you found out who did sell them to him."

"It was a Mrs. Smith. She gave her address as 92 Maple Avenue."

"There's no street called Maple Avenue in this district."

"The same thing struck Mr. Friar. When she left, he sent his boy after her. She had a car parked out of sight round the corner. And he got its number: UGC 368M."

It was at this point that Petrella decided to devote some real attention to the case. He said, "Go down to Graystone Halt. It's the station beyond Cooling on the Isle of Grain branch line. Dr. Lovibond was there two days ago. To hide the fact that he'd been there he told a stupid lie and risked getting into trouble. I'd like to know what he was up to."

"If I disguised myself as a tramp—"

"Wear your old Etonian tie," said Petrella. "No one will mistake you for a policeman."

"It's an odd sort of locality," said Milo. "Flat as your hat. Cabbages and cattle. Ditches between all the fields, running down to the river. You have to pick your way. There's several places you can go in up to your waist."

"Did you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No. I had a guide. A chap who's got a big house down there. He's a stockbroker, but he's mad about birds. The ones with wings and beaks I mean. He spends his time out on the marshes watching them through field glasses."

"And who did you tell him you were? A fellow ornithologist?"

"As a matter of fact I used to be his aide. I thought it was time he did something for me for a change. He gave me a damned good lunch. And we walked over the fields down to the river. He spotted a pair of red-breasted goosanders—"

"It sounds lovely," said Petrella. "I suppose you remembered what you went down there for."

"Certainly. This chap's going to be very useful. He knows all the local characters. Pays them to report the arrival of any rare birds. It's a funny part of the world. Very cliquey, if you know what I mean. There aren't many strangers, and any that come along get noticed. It used to be a great place for smuggling. The ships came up the river by night and the stuff was floated ashore and picked up at the Cassibon Inlet or Egypt Bay. If there was any trouble, they used to hide it in the church at Cooling. Under the pulpit, actually. My friend's going to pass the word round. Give people the number of the car. If that doctor's up to anything they'll soon ferret it out."

Petrella said, "That sounds quite a good arrangement." It had the feel of a nice little gold-smuggling racket. As soon as they got some more information they could act on it. Meanwhile, other more urgent matters occupied the Inspector's time.

It was on a dark day at the beginning of December, a day of drizzle which could turn later into fog, that a further installment of Mr. Mayflower's letter writing arrived on Petrella's desk. On this occasion the correspondent abandoned the police and turned the searchlight of his attention onto the Immigration Service. It seemed that they were being very slow in answering inquiries from anxious relatives in India and Pakistan.

Did his readers know that there were cases where men had come to England and their families had not heard from them for 18 months or even two years?

As Petrella read it, a faint prickle of alarm stirred in his mind. It was an instinctive reaction, born of experience, sharpened by the habit of joining together apparently unassociated scraps of information—which is the basis of all good police work. Some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where, months before, he had read a report—from where, about what? He could see himself sitting back in his chair and reading it. The hot tarry diesel-fumed smell of Patton Street had been coming in through the wide-open window. So it must have been July or August. He had thought the report worth keeping and he had filed it. Interpol. That was it. A routine report from Interpol.

Petrella unearthed it and read it a second time, with the murk of December swirling down Patton Street and the sounds of life coming muffled through the tight-shut window.

A French revenue cutter, patrolling in the early morning mist, had hit a small outboard motorboat which was running without lights. By the time the cutter had succeeded in turning round and getting back to the scene of the collision the boat had sunk, but the crew of two, who were wearing life preservers, had been rescued without much trouble. They turned out to be local fishermen. They had offered no satisfactory explanation of what they were doing, and the lookout on the cutter asserted that, just before the crash, he had seen a third man in the small craft.

The two fishermen had been released after questioning as there seemed to be nothing specific they could be charged with. A fortnight later a body was recovered. It had been swept by the current into the rocks at the foot of the Nez de Joburg and wedged there. It appeared to be an Indian, in early middle age, dressed in what had, before its immersion, been an expensive suit of clothes. Under the coat, in a webbing belt worn round the waist, were twleve four-ounce tablets of gold.

Petrella called for Sergeant Milo Roughead and was irritated to find that he was out on an inquiry. He spent some time after that on the telephone to the Managing Director of Waterside Properties, Limited.

It was four o'clock, and the drizzle of the morning had turned into a thick mist when Milo returned. Petrella said, "There's been a development in the gold-running business. Do you think you could get onto your pal down at Cooling and see if he's got anything to report?"

"I've had three reports from him already," said Milo smugly.

"You've had *what?*"

"Three reports. The last one was two days ago. I don't suppose—"

Petrella said, "Are you trying to tell me that you've had three reports and *sat* on them?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They weren't very conclusive—"

"Do you want to continue in the police force?" The anger in Petrella's voice was so sharp that Milo went scarlet. He found nothing to say. "There is one use, and one use only, for information. You share it. You don't hoard it. Or decide what's important and what isn't. Or wait till you've got everything complete and wrapped so that you can spring it on us as a surprise. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Roughead, in a very small voice.

"Then let's have it."

"The doctor has been seen down there three times. Twice he came by car and once by train to Graystone Halt, and was picked up by his wife. She'd come down earlier by car. She didn't meet him at the station actually. She waited a short distance away and he walked to the car. They've got an old farmhouse on the marshes. It's down a wide path, leading off the main road."

"Don't explain it. Just show me."

Petrella had a one-inch ordinance survey map spread on his desk and Sergeant Roughead put his finger on a dotted line which led out over the marshes and stopped just short of the river. A building was marked at the end of it.

"It's called Barrow's Piece," said Sergeant Roughead. He seemed to have recovered some of his spirits. "A farmer called Barrow built it and committed suicide in the barn. It's pretty lonely. The Lovibonds seem to use it as a weekend cottage."

Petrella had picked up the telephone and dialed a number. Before he could speak, a recorded voice at the other end said, "Dr. Lovibond will not be available until Monday morning. If you have a message would you please speak it slowly, beginning now."

Petrella replaced the receiver and looked out of the window. The mist was thickening into fog. He said, "Tell Anderson I shall want his car, with him driving it. He'd better have a set of chains with him. I won't be starting before ten o'clock."

Milo said, "Right sir. Anderson plus car plus chains at twenty-two hundred hours." He looked like a dog who is not certain if he is going to be taken for a walk or not.

"All right," said Petrella. "You too."

As the car crept through the fog Petrella said, "The main outline's clear enough. Dr. Lovibond had a medical practice in Pakistan. A lot of wealthy clients and a lot of contacts. He was just the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man to run this end of a high-class illegal immigration service. When a rich Pakistani is taken on—one at a time probably—he's told to bring most of his portable wealth with him in gold. He comes over land to the north coast of France and is run out by the fishermen to a small cargo boat, which times its run to arrive off Tilbury in the early hours of the morning.

"At some point before they reach Tilbury the passenger is put ashore near Barrow's Piece. The payoff is in gold. We've found out that the doctor has a small workshop on the Waterside Properties lot. That's where he turns the gold into different saleable objects. Then his wife disposes of them for him. We've traced three of her outlets besides Bloom's Antiques. When we get really down to it we shall probably find a lot more."

"What did he do with the Pakistanis after he got them to Barrow's Piece?" said Sergeant Roughead.

Petrella said to the driver, "You fork left here, Andy, just before you get to the bridge." And to Sergeant Roughead, "That's what we may be going to find out. The doctor's down there and a fog like this is just the job for them."

It was past midnight when they reached the wide path off the main road and drove slowly up it, chains churning the mud. It twisted and turned, between high hedges of thorn, going downhill all the time. Then they were out in the open, with nothing ahead of them but a wall of white mist.

"It can't be too far now," said Sergeant Roughead who had a flashlight on the map and his nose down over it.

"All right. We'll leave the car here," said Petrella. "See if you can turn it around without getting bogged, Andy. You come with me, Sergeant."

A hundred yards, and the house loomed ahead of them. At first they thought it was deserted, but as they came nearer they could see that there was a chink of light in one of the downstairs windows. Petrella touched Sergeant Roughead on the arm and went forward alone. His feet grated on a gravel path and he stood very still. But the window ahead was tightly shut and now he could hear, through it, the sound of music.

He crept forward again, treading through a flowerbed, and peered through the gap in the curtains. Dr. Lovibond was sitting in one wicker chair in front of the fire, smoking a cheroot and reading a newspaper. His wife, in the other chair, was sewing. The portable radio on the table stopped giving out music and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voice made an announcement. The doctor lumbered to his feet and left the room. Petrella heard a door opening on the far side of the house. He wondered exactly what he was going to say if the doctor came round and found him kneeling in his rose bed.

After a few minutes the doctor came back again. Whatever he was waiting for, it had been a false alarm. Petrella crept back to Sergeant Roughead. He said, "They wouldn't be sitting about at one o'clock on a winter morning for fun. They're waiting for something all right. We'll get back to the car—it's got a heater."

Sergeant Roughead said, "G-g-good."

It was nearly four o'clock when they heard it. The moan of a foghorn and the thump-thump of a diesel engine. A small single-screw boat, Petrella guessed, coming up slowly against the stream. They climbed out of the car. During the time they had been sitting there a light wind was starting to roll away the fog.

When Petrella reached the window he saw that Mrs. Lovibond was alone. She had her back to him and was doing something with a bottle and glasses at the sideboard. The beat of the engine was quickening again as the boat picked up speed. The woman half turned her head to listen, and Petrella saw her face for the first time.

Piled gray hair, a beak of a nose, a deep cleft down each side of an unsmiling mouth, a strong firm chin. It was a face that had built empires, a face that had ruled a thousand Indian servants. The face of a pukka memsahib.

The back door banged and Dr. Lovibond came in, carrying a heavy portmanteau in one hand, his other hand on the arm of a tall thin Indian, enveloped in a greatcoat, the astrakhan collar turned up to his ears, a woolen cap pulled down over his head.

The doctor prodded the fire into a blaze, while his wife helped the newcomer to take off coat and cap and sat him down in one of the chairs in front of the fire. Dr. Lovibond produced some dry socks and a pair of slippers which the man put on. Mrs. Lovibond had gone across to the sideboard, where three glasses stood ready. She selected one of them carefully, brought it back, and handed it to their guest. The smile which she switched on as she did so raised her lips away from her teeth.

Petrella put one shoulder to the flimsy casement, which broke inward with a splintering of wood and glass. As he got one knee onto the sill he said, "I don't think I should drink that."

The first to move was the woman. She put down the glass on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the table, took a quick step back to the sideboard, snatched up one of the bottles standing there, and aimed a blow at Petrella's head. Petrella ducked. The bottle missed his head, flew out of her hand, and hit the wall just beside Sergeant Roughead who was climbing through the window.

Petrella got his arms round the woman, who was screaming at the top of her voice. They rolled on the floor together. The two men had hardly moved. The newcomer seemed paralyzed with shock. The doctor looked, without any expression on his face at all at his wife rolling on the floor, at Sergeant Roughead, at the police driver who was climbing through the shattered window.

Then, before they guessed what he was going to do, Dr. Lovibond picked up the glass on the table and swallowed the contents. As his body jackknifed forward onto the floor, the woman started howling.

"Strychnine," said the police doctor. "I suppose the whiskey would have disguised the taste long enough for the visitor to have got enough of it down. One mouthful would have finished him. Your face could do with a bit of patching."

It was nine o'clock and the sun was shining over a landscape which had turned white with frost. Petrella said, "It was her fingernails."

They had taken away Nora Lovibond, strapped to a stretcher. Through the gap in the window Petrella saw the Chief Constable and went out to have a word with him.

The Chief Constable said, "We've found the place. It's just behind the barn. They're opening it up now."

The digging was being done by a constable and Sergeant Roughead. They were uncovering a pit. A dapper figure, in a neat fawn coat, watching the operation was Dr. Summerson, the Home Office Pathologist. He said, "Careful now. It would be better to take the last earth away with your hands." He looked doubtfully at Milo whose face was gray. "That is, if you don't mind. Perhaps I'd better get my coat off and give you a hand."

"That's all right," said Milo. He got down into the pit and started to scrape away the last of the earth.

There were six bodies, each wrapped in a coat, seeming to huddle together in their earthen bed as if to make room for more.

"Peace with Honor," said Milo. He climbed out of the pit, turned away, and was sick.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Nick Velvet is a unique thief—he never steals anything of value, like money, negotiable bonds, jewelry, or objets d'art. For his minimum fee of $20,000 he pilfers only the worthless. Now, Nick has stolen some odd and curious things in his criminous career—the water out of a swimming pool, the tickets to a Broadway show that has closed, the contents (!) of a completely empty room, and more recently, a circus poster, a windowpane, a general's trash, and an admiral's snow.

In this newest adventure of the nefarious Nick he is hired to heist an egg. Not even an ordinary hen's egg worth a few cents, but a wooden darning egg of the kind that is thrown away as junk . . . the ultimate will be when Nick is commissioned to steal nothing*!—and paid his handsome fee to do it! (Mr. Hoch, are you listening?)*

THE THEFT OF THE WOODEN EGG

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The woman seated opposite Nick Velvet was no longer young, but she still had the attractive style of dress and coiffure which the wealthy use to delay the onslaught of age. "You steal things?" she asked him.

"Valueless things. Not money or jewelry."

"Could you steal a wooden egg for me? A wooden darning egg?"

"I'm not quite sure I know what it is."

She opened her big beaded purse and removed a brown egg-shaped object. "It looks just like this."

The thing she passed to Nick was indeed a wooden egg—but longer than a hen's egg and an exact oval, without the larger end common to nature's eggs. There was a small shallow hole in one end where it had been held while being machined into its perfect shape.

© *1976 by Edward D. Hoch.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A darning egg," Nick repeated, turning it over in his hand.

The woman, whose name was Clare Thursby, nodded. "The idea was to hold it under a hole as backing while darning. They're rarely used any more."

"A valuable antique?"

"Hardly! Not the wooden ones, certainly. There were some made out of ivory and marble and jade, and many of those have value. But the one I want you to steal looks just like this—plain wood."

"You know my minimum fee?"

"Twenty thousand dollars?"

"That's right. Just where is this darning egg now?"

"At a resort called the Desert Castle. It's in New Mexico, not far from Taos. It belongs to the owner, Indra Simpson, and I suppose she keeps it in her sewing basket."

"That should be easy," Nick said.

"Maybe not as easy as you think. The Desert Castle attracts a wealthy clientele, and for that reason security is very tight. A single man would be especially suspect. Do you have a wife you could take along?"

"I have someone."

"Good. I'll be arriving at the resort myself in two weeks. Your job must be finished before then. June is something of an off-season there, so you shouldn't have any trouble getting reservations."

She paid him his usual advance and then showed him to the door of her motel room. In his younger days he'd steered clear of deals consummated in hotel rooms, but now that open-air bugging had been refined to an art, it really made little difference. He had to assume that Clare Thursby wasn't an undercover cop gathering evidence against him. If you couldn't trust your own clients, whom could you trust?

When he arrived home, Gloria was watering her vegetable garden in the back yard. "Awful dry for June, Nicky," she said. "They're never going to grow."

"Suppose I take you away from all this for a few days."

"Away?" She eyed him suspiciously. "Where to?"

"A resort—the Desert Castle in New Mexico."

"The desert, in the summertime?"

"Sure. You'll like it."

"You never take me on any of your trips, Nicky."

"And I feel guilty about it. That's why I'm taking you now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She glanced back at her vegetable garden. "I guess I could ask one of the neighbors to water it while we're gone."

Their plane landed at Albuquerque because only local flights went on to Santa Fe and no planes at all went to Taos. The temperature was 93° on the ground and Gloria was already wishing she was back home.

"Is it always this hot here, Nicky?"

"It cools off at night."

"Why would anybody come to a desert resort in the summer?" Then she answered her own question with another one. "Are you on a government assignment?"

"Sort of. I have some work to do here."

They rented a car at the airport and drove north to Santa Fe and then on to Taos. The Desert Castle was about ten miles farther along, nestled against a backdrop of mountains that still showed snow on their peaks.

"How can it be so hot down here and so cold up there, Nicky?"

"You'll cool off in the pool," he assured her, bringing the car to a stop before the big double gates of the resort.

A uniformed guard whose name tag identified him as Pete saluted casually and asked if they had a reservation. Then he directed them to a parking area near the main building. The place did have the appearance of a castle, Nick decided, with low turreted guest houses grouped around twin swimming pools. But judging by the parking lot it was an almost deserted castle.

They registered for their room—a deluxe guest house with a sliding glass door that overlooked the larger of the two pools—and Nick left the unpacking to Gloria while he returned to the lobby to look around. He especially wanted to meet the owner, Indra Simpson.

"Is the boss around?" he asked a young man behind the registration desk. His identification badge had the name Jimmy on it.

"Any problem?"

"No. We just have a mutual friend."

"Mrs. Simpson is the owner. Her husband is dead. This time of day you'll find her out by the pools. No, there she is, just coming in."

Nick followed his gaze and got a shock. The woman striding across the lobby was Clare Thursby, his client.

Or was she?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He looked again and wasn't so sure.

She was about the same age and appearance, but there surely was something about her stride that seemed different. This woman was more self-assured, more in command.

"Pardon me," he said. "Are you Indra Simpson?"

She paused and smiled slightly. "Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I believe I know a relative of yours—Clare Thursby?"

"My sister. How do you know her?"

"My name is Velvet, and I work for a consulting firm back east. I met her recently in New York."

"Interesting. I haven't seen Clare since our mother died last year. Did she recommend this place?"

"She mentioned it. But she didn't prepare me for the striking resemblance between the two of you."

Indra Simpson smiled again. "We have a third sister, Rose, who resembled us in her earlier years. People used to take us for triplets." She shifted suddenly to a more businesslike approach. "How long will you be with us, Mr. Velvet?"

"My wife and I are here for a long weekend. We just want to relax in the sun."

"Enjoy yourself." She left him and went behind the registration desk.

It took Nick only a short time to locate Indra Simpson's living quarters on the spacious grounds of the Desert Castle. Her place was a sort of sprawling cabana near the larger of the two pools, set on a raised terrace that kept it just far enough away from the paying guests. There was no alarm system that Nick could see, and breaking into her place would offer no problems.

He went back to their room and found Gloria in her bathing suit, ready for a swim. "Come on, Nicky, time to cool off!"

"Okay, let's go." There was no point in not enjoying their weekend.

While Gloria splashed and swam in the pool, Nick struck up a conversation with a hairy-chested man of middle age. "Your first time here?" the man asked, lighting up a long Mexican cigar.

"First time," Nick admitted. "First time in New Mexico, in fact."

"Beautiful country around here." The man stuck out a hand. "Name's Romnaker. Charlie Romnaker. I'm in insurance."

"Nick Velvet. I'm a consultant."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Been over to the pueblos yet? They're fascinating—the way those people live!"

Nick shook his head. "We just arrived today."

Romnaker scratched at a patch of graying chest hair. "Looked around Taos on your way through? A hotel there has a collection of paintings done by D. H. Lawrence, the writer. You know, that guy who wrote the sex books? He lived in Taos a long time, I guess."

"I'm not much for sightseeing," Nick said. "We just came here to relax."

"From back east, huh?"

"Around New York."

"Good area. Lived there for a few years after the war. Wife comes from there."

Gloria came out of the pool dripping water and scooped up her towel. Nick introduced her and offered to buy Romnaker a drink from the poolside bar, but he declined. "Bit early in the day for me. These cigars are my only vice before five."

Nick's attention was attracted by the arrival of a limousine at the main entrance. While Charlie Romnaker rambled on about the virtues of Mexican cigars, he watched a stout white-haired woman leave the car and motion for her baggage to be brought in. She was no longer as young or attractive as her two sisters, but there was no doubt in Nick's mind that this was Rose, the third of the Thursbys.

Indra Simpson came out to meet her and they embraced in a perfunctory fashion. Nick watched till they were out of sight, then turned back to Gloria and Romnaker.

Whatever was happening at the Desert Castle, Nick had the feeling he should act fast.

At dinner that evening in the spacious Castle Room, Nick arranged for them to sit with Romnaker. He wanted to be able to leave Gloria alone for a half hour if an opportunity presented itself. As he'd expected, Indra Simpson dined with her sister. When he saw a bottle of champagne being opened he excused himself. "A little stomach upset," he told Gloria. "I'll be back soon."

"Oh, Nicky!"

"Don't worry. It's nothing."

Outside, the desert sun was fading beyond the western hills, and he knew the cool night air would settle over them soon. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crossed quickly to the pool area, surprised to see a few people still swimming. One he recognized was Jimmy, the young man from the registration desk. Apparently he was one the employees given time off to frolic when the guests were at dinner.

The rear windows of Indra Simpson's quarters were sheltered from the pool, and also from the guard at the front gate. It would be possible for him to cut through a screen like a common thief and enter her quarters through an unlocked window.

But then what?

If the wooden darning egg was truly valueless, the most likely place for it was the sewing basket. But where to find that?

He remembered his mother fetching a wicker sewing basket from a closet in the bedroom, but Gloria kept hers in a dining-room drawer. An old aunt had done her sewing in the kitchen. Granted that a woman like Indra Simpson might do some of her own sewing in a dire emergency, in what room would she keep her equipment? Nick went back to the dinner table still puzzling over the question.

"Nicky, are you feeling better?" Gloria asked.

"Sure, fine."

"While you were gone Mrs. Simpson invited all the guests to a party at her place tonight."

Nick perked up. "Oh?"

"Both her sisters are here, and it's a reunion."

He looked quickly over at Indra Simpson's table. Now there were three women at it—Clare Thursby had joined her sisters, though she'd told Nick she wasn't coming for two weeks. Seeing the three of them together, he was aware of the differences in their appearance. They were still sisters, but hardly triplets.

"Should be a good party," Charlie Romnaker said. "Nice of them to invite everyone."

Nick glanced around the dining room. "It looks to me as if there are only seven or eight guests in the whole place."

"Still, it's a nice gesture," Gloria said. "We'll go, won't we?"

"Sure we will."

The three sisters were inevitably the center of attention at the late-evening party that followed. In a voice that mixed family pride with a trace of upstaging, Indra related how the three had enjoyed being brought up under a wealthy but domineering mother schooled in European ways.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She was already divorced from our father by the time we were old enough to notice," Indra said. "There was always just Clare and Rose and me—and mother."

"Is she still alive?" a banker from Chicago asked politely.

"Mama died last year," Clare Thursby answered. "We miss her."

"You must all be very wealthy."

The sisters exchanged glances Nick couldn't read. "Not nearly as wealthy as everyone believes," Rose Thursby replied. She carried her plumpness well, but seemed constantly in the shadow of her flashier sisters. "Indra is the only one who married well."

"Marrying well," their hostess explained with a smile, "means that my rich husband died before he got around to divorcing me. It's his money that started the Desert Castle."

Nick excused himself and stepped into the bathroom. The low hum of conversation still reached him as he took out his penknife and carefully slit open several inches of seam on the inner side of his left trouser leg. Then he put away the knife and returned to the party, passing the Chicago banker in the hall.

"Quite a party," the man said, and Nick smiled agreement.

Gloria was standing near their hostess, sipping a cocktail. "I've had a bit of an accident," he announced to them. "Split open a seam on my trousers."

"Oh, Nicky!"

Indra Simpson was sympathetic. "Such poor workmanship these days. People no longer take pride in their labors."

"I guess we'll have to leave," Nick said. "Unless you might have a needle and thread you could let Gloria borrow. She could patch me up in the bedroom."

"Certainly. I should have thought of that myself." Mrs. Simpson disappeared into one of the bedrooms and returned in a moment carrying a red sewing kit about the size of an overnight bag. "Here, take whatever you need. You can use that bedroom."

In the other room Gloria opened the sewing box and selected the proper thread while Nick removed his trousers. "I'm so embarrassed, Nicky."

"How do you think I feel?"

He hadn't expected Indra Simpson to leave the entire sewing kit with them. He'd only wanted to learn what it looked like and possibly where it was kept. Now, peering into it, he saw the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smooth polished wood of the darning egg. He reached in and took it while Gloria worked over the pants. Nothing could have been easier.

When they returned to the living room Nick tried to catch Clare Thursby's eye, but she looked away. If she knew he had the egg, she wasn't going to admit it. He'd have to wait until she decided it was safe to make contact with him.

Meanwhile there was nothing to do but enjoy the party.

In the morning, when Clare Thursby still had made no effort to get in touch with him, Nick's curiosity about the wooden egg began to get the better of him. While Gloria sunned herself by the pool, he sat alone in their room, turning the egg over in his hands.

There was no message written on it, no tiny carved symbols. It was solid wood and it floated in the bathroom sink. It seemed identical with the one Clare Thursby had shown him back east. He stared at it some more and decided to take a drive into Taos.

"I'll be back soon," he told Gloria. "Don't get too much sun."

She stared up at him from the pool uncertainly. "Be careful, Nicky."

At a doctor's office in Taos he had the wooden egg x-rayed. The physician looked at him strangely as he handed it back. "Just wood. There's nothing inside it."

"I just wanted to make sure."

The doctor grunted. "That'll be ten dollars."

Driving back to the Desert Castle, Nick wondered how long it would be before Mrs. Simpson discovered her egg was missing. And how long after that before she remembered his torn pants and their use of her sewing kit.

He drove through the gates of the resort and parked his rented car. Gloria was not at the pool, but when he headed for their room he spotted her running in his direction.

"Nicky, our room's been searched! Someone's gone through all our clothes!"

He hurried along beside her. "Anything missing?"

"I—I don't think so. But it's a mess—I can't be sure. I was at the pool till about twenty minutes ago and then I went up to the room and found it ransacked."

Nick unlocked the door and stepped inside. Whoever had done it was thorough if not neat. Drawers, suitcases, even his shaving

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kit, had been emptied and searched. He took a deep breath and said to Gloria, "You wait here and don't let anyone in till I get back."

"You're in danger, aren't you, Nicky?"

"No more than usual." He remembered the wooden egg in his pocket. It wouldn't be good to carry it with him. Glancing around the room, he finally went into the bathroom and lifted the lid from the toilet tank and dropped the egg inside. It wasn't a very original hiding place, but he was gambling on the searcher not returning immediately. "Wait here," he told Gloria again on his way out.

He asked Jimmy at the desk for the number of Charlie Romnaker's room. It was at the other end of the main building, facing the big pool. Nick knocked on the door and waited till Romnaker opened it. Then he hit the man in the chest with the flat of his hand and forced his way inside.

"What in hell is this?" Romnaker snarled.

"That's what I'd like to know. You ransacked my room."

"Like hell I did!"

"Cut out the games! I took one breath and I could smell your Mexican cigar. It was you, all right."

Romnaker paled and sat down. "I guess breaking and entering isn't my line. That was dumb of me. I was careful about the ashes but I forgot the smell."

"So what are you up to? What's your game?"

"Insurance, like I told you. We're after the same thing."

"I doubt that."

"The egg—right?"

Nick decided he'd better sit down too. "Maybe you'd better tell me how much you know. And how much I should know."

"Gladly." Romnaker took out one of his cigars. "Ever hear of the Sandhurst diamond? Or a thief named Manac?"

"No," Nick admitted.

"A valuable stone, once owned by a famous British film actress. It was acquired after the second World War by the mother of the Thursby sisters. When she died last year, it was one of her few remaining possessions."

"Who got it?"

Charlie Romnaker smiled. "Since my firm insures it, that's exactly what I'm trying to discover. You see, we didn't learn until quite recently that she'd chosen a unique manner of passing the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stone on to her heirs. It was hidden in one of three identical wooden darning eggs in her sewing basket. Her will stated that each of her daughters should receive one of the eggs, in memory of the childhood days when she darned their stockings."

"A diamond in an egg? Strange, isn't it?"

"Not so strange as you might think. Old Mrs. Thursby came from a European tradition, remember, and they have some odd bits of folklore. It was once believed that eggs laid on Good Friday, if kept for a hundred years, would have their yolks turn to diamonds."

"But you don't know which of the sisters got the diamond egg?"

The insurance man shook his head. "She'd left a letter with my company, to be opened a year after her death, in which she told what she'd done. One of the eggs was carefully constructed like a Chinese puzzle box. Though the wood seemed to be smooth and solid, a needle inserted through a hole at one end released a spring which opened the egg along the line of wood grain. The diamond rested snugly in a padded interior."

"Clever," Nick murmured. He was thinking of the egg back in his room, wondering if diamonds showed up in x-rays. But a spring would certainly have shown up, and there was none in Indra Simpson's egg. "What about this thief you mentioned—Manac?"

"He's new to the business but quite professional. We have no idea what he looks like, though my informers tell me he's here at the Desert Castle, after that diamond."

"Interesting. And what brought Clare and Rose Thursby out here?"

"I did, in a way. Naturally when I read Mrs. Thursby's year-old letter I started contacting the sisters to see if they had the egg containing the diamond. I spoke to Clare and Rose, and they both denied it. Then I got to thinking that one of them could be lying. Whoever has the diamond might want it kept quiet, so her sisters wouldn't demand a share, and the government wouldn't get after her for the inheritance tax. I decided to come out here and speak to Indra Simpson in person, and examine the egg with her. That way I'd be sure of one, at least."

"Have you spoken to her yet?"

He shook his head. "No. The sudden arrival of her sisters may have made that unnecessary. If they're convinced she has the diamond, that's what they've come for."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So why search my room?" Nick asked.

"I know your reputation, Velvet. I've got a file on you."

"Then you know I never steal diamonds—or anything of value."

"Look, I hear there's a mysterious jewel thief on the prowl out here, and I come out and find you. Maybe you're leading a double life these days."

"I'm here with my wife on a vacation."

The insurance man snickered. "Gloria's not your wife."

Nick stood up. His smile was deceptively friendly. "No? What would you call her?"

Romnaker came out of his chair, but not fast enough. Before the first syllable left his lips Nick hit him twice. He toppled backward, overturning the chair as he fell. "When you call her that, smile," Nick said quietly.

Romnaker was groaning on the floor when Nick left him.

Gloria was in her bathing suit again when Nick returned to the room. "If it wasn't so hot we could play tennis, Nicky. Some people are."

"You'd better stick to the pool."

"Did you find out who searched our room?"

He nodded. "It was Romnaker."

"But he seems like such a nice man!"

"You can't trust anyone these days. I'll see you at the pool."

He went out to the house phone in the lobby and called Clare Thursby's room. Nobody answered. She was probably off somewhere with her sisters, but that wasn't helping him any. He wanted to get the wooden egg into her hands, collect the balance of his fee, and head home with Gloria.

Finally he located Indra and Rose on the tennis court, but without Clare. He watched them for a time, until Rose had to stop for a rest. Then he strolled over to Clare Thursby's guest house to see if she'd returned. There was no answer to his knock, but as he started to leave a noise from inside made him hesitate.

It could have been something falling.

There were windows looking onto the patio area, and Nick tried looking through them. Though the blinds were partly closed against the afternoon sun, he could see something moving on the floor. He went back to the door and worked a bit of trickery with the lock. After a few moments of resistance the door opened and he stepped inside.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clare Thursby was lying on the floor, bound and gagged. Her thrashing feet had managed to overturn a small end table.

He quickly removed the gag and untied her. "Who did this?"

"I—I don't know. He was wearing a ski mask."

Nick could see the room had been searched, but more carefully and neatly than his room. This wasn't Romnaker's work—unless the insurance man was a lot cleverer than Nick believed. "Was anything taken?"

"I don't think so. I suppose whoever it was was looking for my egg, but I didn't bring it with me."

"He could have been looking for Indra's egg. I stole it last night."

"You did? You have it?"

He nodded. "Safely hidden. That insurance man, Romnaker, is after it too, and so apparently is a thief named Manac."

"You know about the diamond?"

"I know."

She avoided his eys. "If I'd told you the whole truth, you'd have turned me down. But Indra's egg *is* valueless—I'm sure of it! I just wanted you to confirm it."

"You're right about that," he admitted. "I had it x-rayed."

"Then Rose must have the diamond!"

"That's your business. But this Manac may not be working on his own. He may have been hired the same way I was."

"By one of my sisters?"

"Who else?"

"I'm frightened now," she admitted.

"You should be, after being tied up by a jewel thief."

"Manac, you said?"

"That's the name I heard. Could be a guest or an employee."

Clare Thursby nodded. "Indra's regular staff takes the summer off. These are mostly temporary people."

"Why did you come earlier than you'd planned?"

"That was Rose's idea. She phoned me and said she was coming. She wanted a meeting about the egg."

"What sort of meeting?"

"To agree on an equal split once the diamond was found."

"Did Indra agree to that?"

"Of course not, and neither did I. It belongs to whoever has it." She stood up, working the circulation back into her arms and legs. "Rose probably has it herself, and wanted to divert suspicion."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nick was puzzled. "I have Indra's egg and there's no diamond in it. And there's no diamond in your egg. That leaves Rose. But look at it another way. You hired me and someone else hired Manac. If Rose has the diamond she wouldn't need to hire anyone. But Indra couldn't have hired Manac because she just found out about the diamond today."

"Maybe someone else—" She was interrupted by a knocking at the door. When she opened it, Indra Simpson was standing there, obviously distraught.

"I've been robbed! Someone stole the egg from my sewing box!"

The words were barely out of her mouth when her eyes focused on Nick. "You—what are *you* doing here? Aren't you the man who ripped his trousers last night?"

Nick had to think fast. "I was just in here talking to your sister about these wooden eggs. If you'll put yourself completely in my hands I think I can recover your egg."

"Can you now! I think you're the one who stole it, Mr. Velvet."

"Mrs. Simpson, please hear me out. The only way to resolve this is to get everyone together—you three sisters, myself, and Romnaker the insurance man."

"You're a *thief!*" she shouted.

She struck at his chest, but Nick caught her and held her wrists down. "This will get us nowhere, Mrs. Simpson. Please do what I say."

"Give me back my darning egg!"

"I think if we all get together we can sort out this entire egg business."

At this point Clare intervened. "I think he's right, Indra. Let's do as he says. It can't do any harm to talk it over all together."

It took Indra a few moments to calm down, but finally she agreed. "All right—in my office, after dinner. And Mr. Velvet, I'd suggest you don't try to sneak out on us. I'm on very good terms with the state highway patrol. They'd pick you up before you reached Taos."

"I have no intention of leaving."

"Then I'll see you after dinner in my office. And I'd suggest you have my darning egg with you!"

She turned and left the room without a glance at her sister. "That doesn't give me much time," Nick said when they were alone.

"Time for what?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"For me to deliver the egg and collect the rest of my fee."

"But—she knows you took it!"

"She *suspects* I took it. There's a difference. Don't forget there's another thief on the premises. With luck we can pin everything on him."

"If you can catch him."

"Let me worry about that. Have the money ready."

He crossed the patio and headed back to his own room. In the distance he could see Gloria still lounging by the pool. With luck he could deliver the egg and close the deal before she returned.

In the room he went directly to the bathroom and lifted the lid from the toilet tank. That was when a voice behind him said, "An old hiding place, Mr. Velvet. No sudden movements, please. I have a gun."

Nick felt the muzzle of it behind his left ear. He turned his head just enough to see eyes peering out of a black ski mask. "You must be awfully warm in that thing."

"No talking. Just step aside."

"You would be Manac, I suppose. I've heard about you. I should have checked the closets when I came in. Or were you under the bed?"

"I told you to shut up," the voice warned. A gloved hand plunged into the toilet tank. "Now where is it?"

"Where's what?"

"The egg. It's not here!"

Nick hid his own surprise. "I never said it was. I came in to do some plumbing repairs."

The masked man cursed and struck out with his weapon. Nick managed to duck the full force of the blow, but it was still enough to send him tumbling into the shower. Before he could regain his feet the assailant was gone.

Manac was gone and the wooden egg was gone too.

Nick stared into the toilet tank and did some silent cursing of his own.

Later, after dinner, he went to Indra Simpson's office just off the lobby. Clare and Rose were already there, and Romnaker came in right behind Nick. His jaw was bruised and swollen and he didn't speak.

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Velvet?" Indra Simpson asked. "We're all here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He nodded. "All except Manac, who's been having a very busy day."

"Who is he?" she asked.

"From the way he's been getting into rooms around here, I'd guess he is one of your employees. Though I must admit your door locks aren't all that difficult to open."

Charlie Romnaker finally broke his silence. "Get to the point, Velvet. You told these ladies you could explain the business with the wooden eggs."

"And I think I can." He turned to Rose Thursby. "You hired Manac, didn't you?"

The stout woman spluttered defensively. "How can you say that? I don't know any Manac!"

"Romnaker told only you and Clare about the diamond in one of the eggs. Indra didn't know about it till today, and proof of that is the fact that her egg was casually left in her sewing kit. Now, Charlie here might have hired the thief himself—"

"Like hell!" Romnaker exploded. "I've had about enough from you, Velvet!"

"Calm down. You might have hired the thief, but you didn't. You certainly wouldn't have alerted the sisters to the value of one of the eggs if you were trying to steal it. So that leaves Clare and Rose. Clare hired me, and Rose hired Manac."

She was staring fixedly at the floor. "I never even saw him. It was arranged over the telephone. A friend gave me the number to call."

Indra turned to her sister Rose. "How could you do this to me?"

The plump woman let out a sob. "I needed the money, Indra. I was counting on the inheritance from mother's estate and when it didn't come I was desperate."

"And now? Where is your egg?"

Rose reached into her oversized purse. "I've been carrying it with me, disguised as a tourist gift. You can have it if you don't believe me." She thrust a gift-wrapped box into Indra's hand.

"I'd better take that," Nick said. He undid the slim blue ribbon and silver paper, and lifted the lid from the box. Inside was Rose Thursby's wooden egg.

"Let's check it for the diamond," Clare insisted.

"She wouldn't have hired Manac if she already had it," Nick pointed out. But he probed the tiny hole in one end anyway, using a straightened paper clip from Indra's desk. Nothing happened.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now what?" Romnaker asked.

Nick had the beginning of an idea. "Give me one hour, will you? Everyone go back to their rooms."

There was some grumbling from the insurance man and Indra, but finally they agreed. "Just let me rewrap this egg," Nick said, letting Indra out of the office first.

When he was alone he glanced quickly around the room, looking for something he could use. Finally his eyes settled on the typewriter.

Gloria was reading a magazine when he came in. "I've been lonesome, Nicky."

"Sorry. My business is almost finished."

"Is that a gift for me?"

"No. It's nothing you'd like." He placed the package carefully on the corner of the dresser and reached for the telephone.

"I forgot to tell you, Nicky, we had some plumbing problems this afternoon."

He was only half listening. "Yes?"

"The john wouldn't flush. But I fixed it."

His head came up and he focused on her face in the mirror. "How'd you do that?"

"I looked in the tank and there was a piece of wood stuck there, keeping it from refilling. I took the wood out and then it worked fine."

Nick grunted. "What did you do with the piece of wood?"

"Threw it in the waste basket. It looked like a wooden egg, Nicky."

"Is that so?" He went into the bathroom and looked in the basket. The egg was there, partly hidden by wadded tissues.

Gloria put a hand to her mouth. "Did I do the wrong thing?"

He smiled and gave her a quick kiss. "As a matter of fact, you did exactly the right thing."

Then he picked up the phone and called Clare Thursby's room.

She was waiting by the pool when he reached it, standing half in the shadows where the reflection from the lighted water sent a silvery shimmer across her dress. "You said on the phone you had Indra's egg," she said.

"That's right. Here in the package. We might as well close our deal now—if you have the money."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But that's Rose's egg!"

"I substituted Indra's and rewrapped it. But what difference does it make to you, Clare? You've had the diamond all along."

"What do you mean?" Her face was lost in shadow.

"I've examined the other two. Either Romnaker made up the whole thing—and what could he gain?—or your egg must contain the diamond. That's why you didn't bring it, of course. Once your sisters compared their two eggs, they'd know you had the diamond. So you hired me to steal Indra's egg and then you could pass it off as your own—and when Indra couldn't produce an egg everyone would believe hers contained the diamond. You wouldn't have to split with your sisters or pay any inheritance tax."

She studied his face in the dim light. "Will you tell them?"

"Not if you pay my fee. But if Manac gets Indra's egg, he'll know the truth." He hefted the box casually.

She reached quickly into her purse. "Here's your money."

"And here's Indra's egg."

He watched her walk around the pool carrying the gift-wrapped box. He'd expected something to happen, but nothing had. Perhaps Manac had outwitted him.

Then suddenly he heard Clare gasp. He saw the figure in black grab her from the shadows, wrenching the box from her hand. He started around the pool, but a gun came up in warning. "Keep back, Velvet. I don't want to kill you!"

"And I don't want to die. I won't try to stop you."

Manac backed away into the shadows, leaving Clare Thursby trembling with fright. "He—he's the same man who tied me up!"

"I was expecting him," Nick said. "I figured him for an employee Indra hired for the summer season. And I figured an employee would be listening in when I phoned you just now to arrange this meeting. You see, he still thinks the diamond might be in Indra's egg." He seized her by the arm. "Come on!"

"Where?"

"To catch a thief!"

They found Indra Simpson drinking in the bar with Romnaker. "I want you to get everyone into the parking lot—right away. Do you have a fire alarm you can ring?"

She looked at Nick as if he was crazy. "Sure, but I can't—"

"Yes, you can, and you're going to—right now!"

Three minutes later they were all there—employees and guests, standing under the bright lights of the parking area. Gloria came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

running up to him. "Is there a fire, Nicky? I heard the alarm."

"No fire, except the rubber we'll burn getting out of here."

Then he went down the line of Indra's employees, checking the hands of each of them, feeling just a little like an army captain inspecting his troops. He was counting on Manac's having removed his mask and gloves before opening the package. If he was wrong—

Then he stopped in front of the young desk clerk, Jimmy. "Your hands are dirty, Manac," he said quietly. "You should have kept the gloves on."

Jimmy merely smiled. "You're clever, Velvet. Maybe we'll meet again someday."

"I don't understand," Indra said. "Jimmy is a thief?"

"One of the best—and you and Romnaker can decide what to do with him. I've done my part."

"But how did his hands get so dirty?"

"When I rewrapped the egg, I used the ribbon from your office typewriter."

"Q"

NEXT MONTH...

Special July 4th Issue!

12 *NEW* stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(Centennial story)*
S. S. RAFFERTY *(Bicentennial story)*
ISAAC ASIMOV *(Tercentennial story)*
HUGH PENTECOST *(about Jason Dark)*
HAROLD Q. MASUR *(about Scott Jordan)*
RUTH RENDELL *(about a drop too much)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified MARKET PLACE

The rate per word for Classified Ads is $1.00 each insertion, minimum ad $15.00—payable in advance. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. Space reservations close 1st of 3rd month preceding COVER date. Send order & remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10003.

BLUEPRINTS, PATTERNS & PLANS

NEW CRAFT PRINT CATALOG – Choose from over 100 great easy-to-build plans. Send $1.50 (completely refunded with your first order). BOAT BUILDER, (CP Div.) – 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

WHAT'S going on in housing? Get advice on how to economize in modernizing or improving or adding space from idea to completion. Working blueprints available. Send $1.35 for 110 Better Building Ideas to: Davis Publications, Inc., 229 Park Avenue So., NY 10003.

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

LARGE Catalog Free! Mystery-suspense books. Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 186, So. Laguna, CA 92677.

MYSTERIES. Out of Print Paperbacks. Hardcover. Free Lists. Bengta Woo. One Sorgi Court, Plainview, New York 11803.

SPECIALISTS: Mystery—Detective Adventure, Fantasy, Science Fiction Hard Covered. Monthly Catalogues issued. Stephen's Book Service, P.O. Box 321, Kings Park, L.I., NY. 11754.

CLEAN Smooth paperbacks 3 for $1.00. For free lists write: Economy Paperbacks. Box 3314, Evansville, IN 47732.

PAPERBACKS—15¢ Up! All Kinds. FREE DISCOUNT Price Lists. Bargain Books, Box 7041-K, Richmond, VA 23221.

LOCATE any Book Detective—Mystery specialty. Catalogue $1.00. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 15070, Orlando, FL 32808.

LOVE a Mystery? Free Mystery-Detective book list. Mystery-House, Box 4235, Reading, PA 19606.

BOOKS and Magazine Readers! Send wants: S&S Books, E-40, 80 North Wilder, St. Paul, MN 55104.

SEND for free catalogs of mystery and detective fiction. Canford Book Corral, Box 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

LOVE a Mystery? Free Mystery-Detective book list. Mystery-House, Box 4235, Reading, PA 19606.

FREE send SASE for book list and free Gift. K. Thomsen, Box 952, Albert Lea, MN 56007.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

UFOs—ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS? Pyramids, ghosts, Atlantis, the Flood. $1.00. Mysterology Magazine, Box 6221-BZ, Burbank, CA 91510.

FREE List! Used Hardcover Mystery-Detective Fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, 251 Baldwin Avenue, Meriden, CT 06450.

IDEA book for re-doing or adding to your kitchen and bath improvements. Send $1.35 to KITCHEN & BATH IMPROVEMENTS—229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MAKE Magnetic Signs. Big profits. Details, Universal, Lenora, KS 67645.

HOMEWORK! BIG MONEY addressing, mailing envelopes. Exciting offer 10¢. Linco Services, 3636 Peterson, Chicago, 60659.

FREE Secret Book "2042 Unique, Proven Enterprises." Fabulous "Little Knowns" Work home! HAYLINGS—E14, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

$30.00 HUNDRED Stuffing Our Circulars into Stamped Addressed Envelopes. Immediate Earnings. Beginners Kit $2.00. COLOSSI, 1433-61 Street, DC-6, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

1000% PROFIT Bronzing Baby Shoes. Free Literature. NBC-DG, Gower, MO 64454.

AMAZING NEW opportunity. High potential. Start home, sparetime. Details $1. Sugmad, A-3, 370 North 14th, Las Vegas, NV 89101.

$30.00 HUNDRED Stuffing Our Circulars into stamped addressed envelopes. Guaranteed Earnings. Beginners Kit $2.00. Malone, Box 42-DC6, Brooklyn, NY 11228.

CLIP Newspaper Articles. Get $1.00 to $5.00 each. Details 25¢ and stamped addressed envelope. Bernard Fox, 1723 North Avalon, Wilmington, CA 90744.

BUY BELOW-WHOLESALE! 1,001 items. Catalog $2.00 (Refundable). Enterprises, Dept. 71, 1315 Taper, Long Beach, CA 90810.

$1,000 MONTHLY possible stuffing envelopes/clipping newspapers. Send stamped envelope. Clark, Box 1326Q, Spring Valley, CA 92077.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

CAMPERS, CAMPING EQUIPMENT & TENTS

FREE! Largest RV accessories catalog available! Over 8,000 items. Write: Fredson Mail Order D9, 815 North Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana, CA 92703.

DETECTIVES

CRIMEFIGHTERS! . . . SHOPLIFTING! . . . LOCK PICKING! . . . DEbugging! All 3 for $5.00. Don-Q, Box 548-dv, Seattle, WA 98111.

DO IT YOURSELF

"BE A WINEMAKER" Book contains step by step instructions, many favorite recipes, $2.00. W. P. Hawkins, 532 W. Hillsdale, Inglewood, CA 90302.

INFORMATIVE HANDBOOK—For people with an interest in electronics and desire to know more. Covers basic electricity, resistors, capacitors, microwaves, facts on frequency, about fuses, circuit breakers, crystals and much more. Send $1.50 for your copy (includes postage) to: Electronics Theory Handbook, 229 Park Avenue South, N.Y., NY 10003.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTIONS

ESOTERIC College, Seminary, University; Plus! Details $2.00. P.O. Box 15098, Minneapolis, MN 55415.

INFORMATIVE BOOKLET—"How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad. Send $1.25 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

FOR SALE — MISCELLANEOUS

YOUR RETREAT. VIEW MOUNTAINS, LAKE. TWO SAFE TOWN LOTS. $399 (TWENTY $19.95/MO. PAYMENTS). PERMANENT MONEYBACK GUARANTEE. INFORMATION: FREEDOM, BOX 515, CONRAD, MT 59425.

FOR THE HOME

REDUCE central air conditioning energy 20-40%. GUARANTEED $3.00. $AVE, 910 West McElroy, 7EQ76, Stillwater, OK 74074.

FOR anyone who wants the satisfaction and economy of repairing, furnishing and maintaining the furniture in his home. Send $1.50 (includes postage) to FURNITURE, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487 Anaheim, CA 92805.

MAILING LISTS

ADDRESSES, 100+/$2, 1000+/$12. Simmons, E470, Roseville, MI 48066.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

STUFF, MAIL ENVELOPES!! $250.00 profit per thousand possible. Offer details: Stamped, self-addressed envelope. Kings, B-21487K-76, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33306.

$150.00 WEEKLY stuffing our circulars into stamped addressed envelopes. Guaranteed earnings. Beginners Kit $2.00. Malone, Box 42-DC5, Brooklyn, NY 11228.

CASH FOR BOXTOPS, Labels, Details 15¢. Refund Bulletin, DP, Postoffice Box 503, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701.

EXTRA Income!! Compile information in your area. No experience necessary. Details 25¢. Oyewole, Box 4577, New York, NY 10017.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Identity, Box 315-DC, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

ZERO CASH BUSINESSES! COSIGNERS! 100% FINANCING! BGS International-4, 210 Fifth Avenue, N.Y., NY 10010.

JAPANESE introduction! Girl's photographs, descriptions, brochure, details. $1.00. INTERPACIFIC, Box 304-SC, Birmingham, MI 48012.

1000 LADIES Photos matrimonial catalog—$3.00. Intercontact, Box 737, Lauderdale, FL 33302.

DATES GALORE! Meet singles-anywhere. Call DATELINE, toll-free (800) 451-3245.

"DATE WITH DIGNITY" Professional Matching. Drawer 6765. Fort Worth, 76115 (817) 921-0281 Anytime.

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, descriptions, questionnaire, Etc. Japan International, Box 156-AA, Carnelian Bay, CA 95711.

A serious, informative, entertaining magazine covering just about every topic of interest to hikers. Includes a "Buyers' Guide to Equipment" and a "Beginner's Section" for those who want to learn about hiking and backpacking. Send $1.60 (includes 25¢ for postage/handling) to: Backpacking Journal, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN GIRLS Wanting American Boy-Friends. Details, Photos "Free," World, Box 3876-DC, San Diego, CA 92103.

MORE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

PERSONAL — Cont'd

COLLEGE DEGREES by mail. Free Details. Write: Rhodes, 8317D S. King Dr., #2C, Chicago, IL 60619.

"DATE WITH DIGNITY" Professional Matching. Drawer 6765. Fort Worth, 76115 (817) 921-0281 Anytime.

"HOW I Conquered Arthritis, Rheumatism and Poor Circulation. Simple ancient cure. Portfolio $5.00. H. G. S., P.O. Box 18527, Holiday City, TN 38118.

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, descriptions, questionnaire, Etc. Japan International, Box 1181-AA, Newport Beach, CA 92663.

WANT Money? Get it with my valuable Occult Bag! $3.75, premium included. Garry Johnson, 285 Fenimore Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225.

BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN GIRLS Wanting American Boy-Friends. Details, Photos "Free," World, Box 3876-DC, San Diego, CA 92103.

LONESOME? Send self addressed stamped envelope & $2.00 for 25 Special individual Introductions. You will get order by return mail. Lois Reader, Box 920, Palestine, TX 75801.

PHOTOGRAPHY—PHOTO FINISHING & SUPPLIES

SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!!! Make your own S & M Densitometer. Send $3.00 for detailed drawings and instructions. A must for successful photography in your darkroom. Order direct: S & M Instruments, Dept. E.Q.2, 229 Park Avenue South, N.Y., NY 10003.

RARE & OUT-OF-PRINT BOOKS

FREE - CATALOGUES. Detective-Mystery Booksearch. Box 15460, Orlando, FL 32808.

RAZORS & SHAVING SUPPLIES

SWITZERLAND'S finest razors. 2 or 3 heads—$12.00 or $15.00 each. Guaranteed. Spare heads available. Kilbourne Enterprises, RD1, Genoa, NY 13071.

SURPLUS EQUIPMENT

GIANT Bargain Packed Canadian Surplus Catalogs $1.00. Etco Electronics-DG, Box 741, Montreal "A."

TIPS FOR THE HOME, ETC.

PRACTICAL tips for home, garden and workshop are in "1001 How-To Ideas." Send $1.50 for your copy (includes postage) to 1001 How-To Ideas, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

HOW TO ORDER EQMM
(new readers only)

☐ Please send me 7 issues of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for ONLY $5.52 (I save $2.60 off regular rates).

☐ I prefer 14 issues ONLY $11.04, doubling my savings.

In Canada & U.S. Possessions add 70¢ postage each 7 issues; other countries add $1.40.

name _____

address _____

city _____

state _____ zip

TO: ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
P.O. Box 2600
Greenwich, Conn. 06830 **H6A286**

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

name (please print)

address

city

state

zip

Please attach the mailing label from the front cover when writing about service or change of address. Allow 3-4 weeks for change of address to take effect.

FILL IN NEW ADDRESS AT LEFT.

Thank you.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

15 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR $1.

Worth $93.80 in Publishers' Editions.

These 15 thrillers cost $93.80 in the publishers' original editions. But you get all 15 full-length novels (in 5 handsome hard-bound volumes) for only $1. We would like to send you these 15 great mysteries to prove to you that The Detective Book Club gives you more and asks less than any other club. You pay no membership fee. There is no minimum number of books you must buy. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it. You may cancel your membership at any time.

Savings of $4 or more on every mystery you read

When you accept a Club selection, you get three complete, uncondensed detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume for only $3.89. That's $2, $3, or even $4 less than ONE mystery costs in the publisher's original edition. The Club's editors select the best from the more than 300 mystery books published each year. Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those mentioned plus Jon Cleary, Len Deighton and others.

Send the card now to get your 15 mysteries for $1. The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, New York 11576.

John D. MacDonald. The Dreadful Lemon Sky. *"Literate, sardonic, chockablock with mayhem . . . like all his books, it is superior entertainment."*—The Boston Globe (Publ. Ed. $7.50)

The Deep Blue Good-by. ($6.95)

Erle Stanley Gardner. The Case of the Postponed Murder. ($5.95)

J. J. Marric. Gideon's Fog. ($5.95)

Agatha Christie. Nemesis. ($5.95)

Georges Simenon. Maigret and the Man on the Bench. ($5.95)

Leslie Charteris. Catch the Saint. ($5.95)

Mignon G. Eberhart. Danger Money. ($5.95)

Gordon Ashe. The Big Call. ($5.95)

Brian Garfield. Death Wish. ($5.95)
Death Sentence. ($6.95)

E. X. Ferrars. Alive and Dead. ($5.95)

George Harmon Coxe. No Place for Murder. ($6.95)

Ellery Queen. A Fine and Private Place. ($5.95)

Dick Francis. Knockdown. ($5.95)

Please enroll me as a member and send at once my five triple-volumes shown below, containing 15 mysteries. I enclose *no money now*. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all 5 volumes for the special new member price of only $1 (plus postage and handling) or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly *Preview* which describes my next selections but I am not obligated to accept them; I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book at the Club's expense for full credit. For each monthly 3-in-1 selection I keep, I will send you only $3.89 (plus postage and handling). I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, New York 11576

Name_____

Street_____

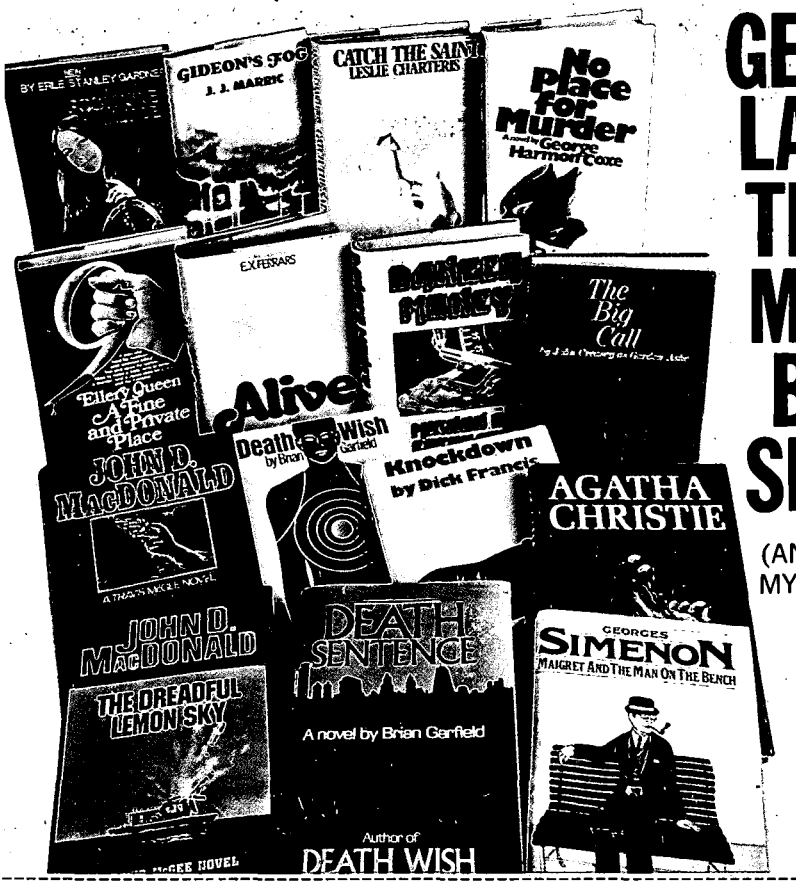
6–EO

City_____

49-405

State_____ Zip_____

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Ontario; offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GET TH
LATES
TRAVI
McGE
BEST-
SELLE

(AND 14 OTHE
MYSTERIES FO
JUST $1.)

First Class
Permit No. 7
Roslyn, N.Y.

Business Reply Mail
No postage stamp necessary
if mailed in the United States
Postage Will Be Paid By

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, New York 11576

(See
other s
for furt
details

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED